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MAHATHIR-RIFT

MAHATHIR DENIES REPORTS OF RIFT BETWEEN HIM AND DAIM

KUALA LUMPUR, May 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today denied reports that there was a rift between him and Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin following the appointment of Datuk Nor Mohamed Yakcop as his Special Adviser on financial matters.

"There had been reports of this rift between me and Tun Daim for ages," he said, adding that ever since Tun Daim joined the government, there had been talk of Tun Daim not getting along with Dr Mahathir.

"Yet at a time of crisis, he joins the government and helps to solve our problems," he told a press conference at the end of the first day of the 54th UMNO general assembly here.

However, despite all these talk and reports of the so-called rift, Dr Mahathir said their relationship had been cordial.

"We still smile and hug each other and still run the government quite successfully," he added.

Asked whether Tun Daim had indicated intention to quit from his cabinet post, Dr Mahathir said the finance minister had made a condition before re-joining the government that his tenure would only be temporary and that there was a shortage of skills and talents in the cabinet then.

The prime minister said he believe that once the economy was turned around to its pre-crisis level, Tun Daim might want to resign.

"That was the condition he made in returning to the government. He always made it very clear that he doesn't want to stay in the government forever. Unlike others, he does not vie for any post in the party," said Dr Mahathir.

When pressed by a reporter on whether Tun Daim would resign soon, he said "I don't know. You pray for the economy to turn around to eight percent per year."

Asked to comment on his presidential address this morning that the Malays were too choosy in terms of the type of employment, the prime minister said it was a natural phenomenon.

However, he said it should be remembered that when the Malays refused to undertake heavy and dangerous jobs, they would eventually lose their influence and hold on the country.

"That is why we have to explain and train them so that they will change their culture (Sebab itu kita perlu perjelaskan dan latih mereka supaya budaya mereka bertukar)," he added.

He also said the government had a way to change this mindset but whether it wanted to do it or not was another matter. -- BERNAMA

AD SHY