

FINANCE UNDER PM

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By SA'ODAH ELIAS

PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has taken charge of the Finance Ministry following the resignation of Tun Daim Zainuddin on Friday.

The Prime Minister has also assumed the post of Special Functions Minister, dropped by Daim along with all other government and Umno posts he had held.

Dr Mahathir said, however, Daim would remain as Merbok MP.

The Prime Minister said his duties would be effective from yesterday.

He said he had written to the secretary-general of the Finance Ministry advising him that he (Dr Mahathir) was now the acting Finance Minister.

"But this is only a temporary measure, just like in 1998," he told reporters at his office after launching a book, *The Propagation of Islam in the Indonesian-Malay Archipelago*.

Late in 1998, Dr Mahathir temporarily acted as Finance Minister following the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the Government.

At that time Daim was the Special Functions Minister overseeing "matters pertaining to the development of the country's economy."

He was appointed First Finance

Daim will only retain his post as Merbok MP, says PM

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Minister on Jan 8, 1999 while still holding the post of Special Functions Minister.

In a Cabinet reshuffle on Dec 11, 1999 Daim retained both portfolios.

Asked how long he would be acting Finance Minister this time around as the pre-Budget dialogues were scheduled to start in the next few weeks, Dr Mahathir said:

"If I learn enough about finance before the sessions start then I will chair the dialogues. But at the moment I am not so confident.

"I am also not sure how long I will stay (as acting Finance Minister)."

Dr Mahathir also confirmed that Daim had resigned from his other posts in the Government and Umno except from

his seat in Parliament.

They include his position as Langkawi Development Authority chairman and Umno treasurer-general.

Dr Mahathir was non-committal when asked if he had already decided on a candidate to succeed Daim but said the person would have to be suitable for the post.

Asked if suitability meant that the candidate would have to have a background in either banking or finance, he said that was not necessary.

Asked if he would announce Daim's successor before the Umno general assembly, scheduled for later this month, Dr Mahathir said: "*In-syaAllah* (God willing)."

He said that at the moment he was still looking for the right candidate and was open to suggestions.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on speculation that former Bank Negara governor Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman, MP for Gua Musang Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Bank Negara assistant governor Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussein were among the possible candidates.

He replied: "I do not know, I will look at the list."

In a related development, Bank Negara Malaysia announced yesterday that Dr Awang has resigned as assistant governor in order to be actively involved in politics.

Dr Awang has served Bank Negara for 16 years, the central bank said in a statement, according to *Bernama*.

The former university lecturer is the Bachok Umno division deputy head, a post he won in April.

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