

'I need time to decide'

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By R. Manirajan

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he needs some time to decide on the appointment of the new finance minister who will have to be an uncontroversial figure, clean and knowledgeable in finance and economics.

Filling the finance minister's post requires careful study as it is a very serious appointment that cannot just be given to "anyone", he said.

Therefore, he will need time for evaluation before the new finance minister, who may or may not be a politician, is appointed, he told reporters after launching a book on

Petronas' 25-year history and its achievements entitled *A Vision Realised - The Transformation of a National Oil Corporation*.

Former Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin resigned from the government on June 1 after taking two months of leave. He also resigned as the special functions minister and Umno treasurer the same day.

Mahathir, who has taken over as acting finance minister and special functions minister, said he does not want to be pressured into making a decision on an important position in the government.

"I want to give myself the freedom to decide on something which I think is important to us," he said.

The matter need not necessarily be raised at the Umno General

Assembly next week but he will report it to the Umno General Assembly, he said. "For this, I will seek the help of Tun Daim."

Mahathir said the duties of the prime minister and finance minister are equally heavy and he is finding ways to operate as both.

He was considering all possibilities, including appointing a second finance minister, he said.

It was also possible that the finance minister will also be the Umno treasurer.

Dismissing speculation of a rift between him and Daim, he said: "No rift ... I am still friendly with him."

He said Daim felt that "maybe some people don't quite appreciate what he was doing and he felt it was time for him to leave the government".