

PM still deciding on candidate for new Finance Minister

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By **HAMISAH HAMID**

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is still scouting for the new Finance Minister, a person who is "clean and not controversial".

The candidate must also be finance-savvy and could be a politician or non-politician.

Dr Mahathir assumed the post of acting Finance Minister when former Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin resigned on June 1.

"He (the candidate) could be a politician, could be a non-politician, I don't know.

"I want to give myself the freedom to decide on something that I think is very important to us," he told reporters after launching the book on Petronas entitled "A Vision Realised: The Transformation of the National Oil Corporation" in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir said he is looking at many candidates for the Finance Minister post but they have yet to be shortlisted.

Asked if the candidate will be a fresh face, he said: "It could be... as I said, everything is open. If you ask me, I would say it could be because at the moment, I haven't made any decision."

The Prime Minister said he is considering all possibilities, including the creation of a second Finance Minister post as was the case during the 1998 regional economic crisis.

"I have to study the possibility, it is a very serious appointment.

"I can't just give it to an-

ybody...I will have to spend a little bit of time evaluating," he said.

He also did not rule out the possibility of the new Finance Minister filling the post of Umno treasurer-general which was also vacated by Daim.

Asked if he will continue to be Finance Minister, Dr Mahathir said: "The duties of a Prime Minister are very heavy and so is the post of the Finance Minister. So, I am trying to work out how to operate until I find a Minister of Finance."

He also dismissed speculation on the rift between him and Daim.

"There was not rift. I think it was a friendly parting.

"He (Daim) felt that maybe some people are not appreciating what he was doing and thought it was time for him to leave the Government," he said.

Daim, who resigned after taking two months' leave from the Government, gave no reason for his resignation.

Several names speculated to be on the list of candidates to fill the Finance Minister's post include the Prime Minister's special economic adviser Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman, who is also former Bank Negara governor; Gua Musang Member of Parliament Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who was previously a Finance Minister; Bank Negara's former assistant governor Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussein; and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.