

# *Time is needed for decision*

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PM: Finance Minister's  
post requires evaluation

By FARIDAH BEGUM

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he will take his time to name a replacement for Tun Daim Zainuddin who resigned as Finance Minister early this month.

"I want to give myself the freedom to decide on something that is very important to us," he told reporters after launching the book, *A Vision Realised: The Transformation of the National Oil Company*, which traces the growth of Petronas.

The Prime Minister assumed the post on June 1, along with Daim's other key position as Special Functions Minister.

Daim, who remains MP for Merbok, had also resigned as Langkawi Development Authority chairman and Umno treasurer-general.

Dr Mahathir said his workload as Prime Minister was heavy and that of Finance Minister was equally so.

"I am trying to work out how I am going to operate until I find a finance minister," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was considering all possibilities over the appointment including the creation of a second Finance Minister position as was the case during the 1998 regional economic crisis.

Dr Mahathir also assumed the Finance Minister's portfolio then.

"I have to study this thing ... it is a very serious appointment. I can't just give it to

anybody ... 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 vacant Umno treasurer-general post.

He added that he would not be rushed into making the decision even though expectations were that he would announce it at the Umno general assembly on June 20.

Asked about speculation that there was a rift between him and Daim, Dr Mahathir said: "There was no rift ... I think it was a friendly parting.

"He felt that maybe some people were not appreciating what he was doing and he thought it was time for him to leave the Government," the Prime Minister said.

Asked about unconfirmed reports that Daim's house was raided by police, Dr Mahathir said he did not have any knowledge of this.

"No, not that I know of. I don't know if someone had done it but I certainly don't know anything about it," he added.

On other matters, the Prime Minister said the Government was studying a proposal for Malaysia Airlines to increase fares in Peninsular Malaysia.

On reports that the Bakun dam project would be given to Sarawak tycoon Tan Sri Ting Pek Khing, Dr Mahathir said: "Anyone who makes a good offer deserves it.

"I don't want to discriminate against anybody simply because he is a controversial figure," he added.