

ON LEAVE

STAR 22 APR 2001

Daim taking two-month break, says PM

By MERGAWATI ZULFAKAR and JANE RITIKOS

KUALA LUMPUR: Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin has gone on two-month leave but it is not a prelude to his resignation from the Government as widely speculated.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who confirmed Daim's leave yesterday, said the Finance Minister did not give any indication that he was stepping down.

"Maybe he has been working too hard," Dr Mahathir told reporters in Genting Highlands when asked to comment on a website report that Daim had applied for three months' leave and that a Cabinet minister would be acting for him.

"He (Daim) is still in the office. He still has work in the office. Even though he is on leave, he still comes in to look at documents and letters," Dr Mahathir said.

On Daim's reason for taking leave, Dr Mahathir answered: "Probably he is tired. You all disturb him too much, asking him questions non-stop and criticising him for MAS (Malaysia Airlines) and this and that."

Dr Mahathir declined to comment when asked by reporters whether this was a prelude to Daim resigning, saying, "You have to ask him."

"If you ask me and I answer, he might get angry," he said after opening the National Education Convention 2001 at the Aminuddin Baki Institute at Sri Layang.

Dr Mahathir said Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz would represent Daim in the Cabinet.

At another function later, when asked if there will be a replacement for Daim, Dr Mahathir laughed and said: "We will cross the bridge when we come to it. At the moment there is no such thing."

Asked if Daim had gone on leave at a bad time

● TURN TO PAGE TWO

Daim went on leave early this month, says aide

FROM PAGE ONE

STAR

7 APR 2001

because of the problems facing the economy, Dr Mahathir said:

"He is not leaving (the Government) in the first place. He is just going on leave.

"Although he is seen as going on leave, he is still doing his work.

"He still goes through his papers although he does not attend the Cabinet meeting and the Umno supreme council meeting," he said.

An aide to Daim said the Finance Minister started his leave early this month.

"He has not had a break since returning to the Government as National Economic Action Council executive di-

rector in December 1997.

"He has been coming to the office daily since starting his leave.

"Last week, he attended an NEAC exco meeting and he has been attending official functions. So, the only change is (that) he has not been attending Cabinet meetings since his leave," the aide added.

In a press statement, DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang questioned Daim's leave "when the country is facing a second economic crisis in four years."

Describing the development as "bizarre and irresponsible," Lim asked why "a junior minister" was picked to represent Daim in the Cabinet.

Dr Mahathir also said his

two finance advisers would assist him in monitoring ongoing and up-coming privatisation projects as well as matters pertaining to bank loan applications.

Former central bank governor Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman joined Nor Mohamed Yakcop, another former central banker, as finance adviser to the Prime Minister

on Monday.

To a question whether his finance advisers had been tasked to monitor privatisation projects, Dr Mahathir replied:

"Yes, it (their duties) includes all. If we find there is a problem which needs to be studied, they will study it and advise me so I will understand the problem better."