

Dr M: Daim free to travel abroad

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TUN Daim Zainuddin is free to travel abroad as he is not under arrest, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said there was no restriction on Daim but he did not know whether the former Finance Minister had gone overseas.

"I saw him just before the Umno meeting (general assembly) but he didn't tell me whether he was going abroad or not," Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, told a press

conference at the end of the second day sitting of the assembly yesterday.

"Daim lamented that the press was going to misconstrue the reason for him leaving the country.

"He said that it is a problem for him — that if he goes abroad, the press is going to say he is running away from arrest.

"He is not going to be arrested, so he can go abroad. No restriction, whatsoever."

Dr Mahathir, who has taken over the Finance Ministry, was also asked if the Government was planning to issue sovereign bonds.

He said that Bank Negara governor had mentioned the matter to him but he did not know the amount involved.

On the next Umno General Assembly, scheduled in 2003, Dr Mahathir said it might be deferred as it was close to the general election, due in 2004.

"Although it is still too early

to consider the matter, it is worth thinking about," he added.

Asked about his prospective successor, Dr Mahathir said: "The leadership succession in the party and the country is based on the Number Two man.

"If I am not around, Datuk (Seri) Abdullah (Ahmad Badawi) will take over," he said, adding that his deputy was well-versed with Vision 2020.

Dr Mahathir said Vision 2020 was not meant for him as

he would most likely not be around.

"By 2020, I hope to be hovering over this country, up there watching whether they are implementing this (Vision 2020) or not," he quipped.

"But I have already made sure they will work for that vision. It's not necessary for me to be around (for Vision 2020 to materialise)," he added.

Dr Mahathir said it was his duty as a leader to point people in the right direction.

"If I am going to follow them, then I am a follower. As a leader, I have to lead. I have to tell the people, this is the way to go.

"Of course some people may not like it. That is too bad. I know many people don't like me, (but) it's all right."

He said there was nothing he could do if the people decided to vote against Umno.

"What can I do? There are some people who like to live in cloud nine," he said.