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Abdullah-Minister

ABDULLAH SCOFFS HE'S NEW FINANCE MINISTER RUMOURS

KUALA LUMPUR, June 7 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today brushed aside rumours that he will be appointed new Finance Minister to replace Tun Daim Zainuddin who resigned last week.

The Deputy Prime Minister said he knew nothing about who Daim's successor would be.

Daim resigned from all government and party posts on Friday but remains Member of Parliament for Merbok.

"Why don't you ask the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad). I don't have anything to do with appointment of ministers," Abdullah told reporters here when asked on rumours that he would be the next Finance Minister.

Abdullah said for the time being, Dr Mahathir is the acting Finance Minister and Special Functions Minister, both posts vacated by Daim.

When asked about Daim's successor as Umno treasurer, Abdullah said Dr Mahathir is acting party treasurer for the time being.

Asked when the new Umno Treasurer would be appointed since the party would hold its general assembly soon, Abdullah said: "When the president of the party (Dr Mahathir) feels that the appointment should be made."

Asked whether there is a deputy treasurer in the Umno hierarchy, Abdullah replied in the negative adding that there is only a single post of treasurer.

On a separate issue, Abdullah was asked about Sabah politician Datuk Sairin Karno reportedly being asked by the Abu Sayyaf group to negotiate for the release of hostages being held by the Muslim separatist rebels in southern Philippines.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said the Philippine government by itself could handle the hostage crisis in the latest abduction by the rebels without having to involve the Malaysian government.

Abdullah said Manila was actively seeking an end to the latest hostage crisis sparked off by the Abu Sayyaf and Kuala Lumpur saw no reason at all to interfere.

Asked further about the Abu Sayyaf's insistence on Sairin being the mediator to end the crisis, Abdullah said: "We cannot accept the Abu Sayyaf's demand."

A Reuters report from Zamboanga today quoted the spokesman for the rebels Abu Sabbaya as demanding that the Philippine government let Malaysian representative Sairin negotiate with them or risk seeing three American hostages executed.

In MANILA, the Philippine government today slammed Abu Sayyaf's demand that Sairin be allowed to negotiate for the release of its hostages.

"We cannot authorise anybody, especially foreign citizens, to negotiate with the Abu Sayyaf," presidential spokesperson Rigoberto Tiglao said.

Tiglao said President Gloria Arroyo had designated a military officer as the negotiator and he was the only authorised representative of the government to talk with the Abu Sayyaf.

The three Americans -- Martin Burnham, his wife Gracia, 42, and Guillermo Sobrero -- were abducted from a resort off the western island of Palawan on May 27.

They are among 13 hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf in Basilan. Martin Burnham reportedly suffered shrapnel wounds Monday following a clash between the bandits and the military.

Malaysian Ambassador Arshad Hussain said the Malaysian government had not allowed anyone to negotiate with the Abu Sayyaf.

He said Malaysia had yet to receive any request from the Philippine government for help in dealing with the bandits.

-- BERNAMA

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