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Daim raps media for speculating about his leave

FINANCE Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin, whose two-month leave has been front-paged by most if not all of the country's newspapers, took the media to task yesterday for their "boundless enthusiasm" for speculation.

"I could sense a certain buzz in the air as the press is again on the curiosity streak. I hope this important Corporate Governance conference will not be obscured by the boundless enthusiasm of the press to discuss the matter of my leave afterwards.

"I would not be able to partake in the usual exercise of responding to rapid-fire questions with my friends in the media, struggling to make myself heard amid the din and confusion.

"I am actually going straight to Parliament (for the tabling of the Eighth Malaysia Plan by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad)," he told participants of the International Conference on Corporate Governance - From Conformance to Performance in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

But the press, not unexpectedly, did not or would not listen.

A throng of reporters waited in ambush at the Parliament lobby precisely to shoot "rapid-fire questions" at him as he was leaving after the tabling of the Plan.

"I am on leave," Daim protested.

Asked whether this was the right time to take time off from his ministerial duties, he said:

"Why? Am I not entitled to take leave. It's (economic situation) just a slowdown."

News of his two-month break has fuelled talk that the Finance Minister-cum-Umno treasurer may be quitting the Cabinet.

Later, asked by reporters why Daim was in Parliament when he is on leave, Dr Mahathir quipped: "Maybe he wants to listen to my speech."

Earlier at the corporate governance conference, Daim also noted the media's predisposition to jump to conclusions and to criticise.

"Allow me to register a small, harmless complaint. When we went about effecting the changes at Tenaga Nasional Bhd, Asian Wall Street Journal took offence," he said in reference to the changes implemented by the Government to the top management of the national utility.

"Substantial articles were written on the alleged attempt by the Minister of Finance to instal his so-called cronies. Worse, it seemed that the changes illustrated a certain rift.

"The acid irony is the clamour for such changes originated from the market. I suppose governments are not supposed to vent our frustrations.

"We are expected to be stoic and duly absorb the punishment."

As for the perceived poor standard of corporate governance in Malaysia, Daim said:

"If there were any truth at all to the shocking allegation that the Malaysian media is compliant, they would have surely splashed news on the arrests and the charging (of certain individuals), for it would be good for the country.

"The truth of the matter is there is nothing new or newsy about Malaysian authorities prosecuting wrong-doers for offences related to fraud, corruption, market manipulation."

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