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Daim: I'm on leave to clear up files

SUNGAI PETANI, Thurs. - Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin said his two-month leave from office would enable him to excuse himself from meetings and clear up files on development projects.

"I'm on leave ... the economy has slowed down again. I still come to work as I have to catch up with the files ... if I (have to) attend meetings all the time, I'll have no time to clear the files.

"I've to make sure there are economic activities in this country but if the files on my table do not move then there'll be no projects on the ground," he said.

It was reported that Daim still goes to his office in Putrajaya daily to check on important documents after going on leave.

Daim's leave has become a subject of speculation prompting many quarters to suggest that it was a prelude to his resignation.

However, Daim said people persisted in believing all kinds of rumours because it had become a culture in the country.

"It's the culture here ... we say don't spread or believe rumours but people still do.

"The more we answer, the more they twist it and say it's true ... that's why it's better to ignore."

Asked why his leave had been turned into an issue, Daim said: "It's because people have nothing else to do ... nothing else to get excited about, so they get excited about my leave.

"The (stock) market is down ... (it's) very dull and needs some excitement so they find this fellow going on leave and decide to create some news."

On Opposition criticism that he had been irresponsible by going on leave at a time when the economy was down, Daim said he was not answerable to them.

Daim, who is also Merbok Member of Parliament, was speaking after attending a ceremony to honour 12 Umno veterans here in conjunction with Umno's 55th anniversary celebrations.

On another topic, Daim said he was not concerned about books written about him or other Umno leaders in the run-up to the party's general assembly in June.

"This has become an Umno culture ... (they) like to gossip, write poison pen letters and books.

"During the assembly, sales of such book are good and seasonal writers take this opportunity.

"They'll write (books) if there is someone who wants to finance them ... I won't be surprised if this is also the case this time," he said.

When told there was already a book, titled Diam Diam Daim, about him being sold, Daim said: "It's all right, I've not seen the book and I've no comment.

"This is a free country and anyone who wants to write a book can do so as long as he doesn't break any law."

On books that attacked him personally, Daim said it was nothing new as all kinds of things had been written about him worldwide.

"It's normal, the Malays like this kind of stories but it doesn't affect me as I don't read such books."

On the fact that such books had put an end to the careers of many, Daim said:

"It's okay ... well, unless people are being unwise and get influenced by this kind of things.

"Otherwise there's no problem."

On the proposal to bar the very rich from contesting for Umno posts, Daim said it didn't concern him as he had never contested any position in the party.

Meanwhile, Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said in Kuala Lumpur Daim had assured the movement that he had not sent any resignation letter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Hishammuddin said Daim had said this after receiving a courtesy call from the movement's executive members last night.

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