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Dr Mahathir to chair 2002 Budget dialogue

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday he will chair the forthcoming 2002 Budget dialogue with representatives of various economic sectors.

"Yes...(for) three days," he said when asked whether he will lead the Finance Ministry's team to the dialogue, held annually to gain feedback and input before the Budget is drawn up.

On whether he will have the time to chair the sessions and later table the Budget in Parliament, Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, replied: "I will find time, it is my job. Moreover, I have my deputies and officials to assist me."

Turning the tables on the reporter who asked the question, he said in jest: "You seem not to have much confidence in my ability. Bolehlah ... I tabled the 1998 Budget."

At a Press conference after a dialogue with participants of a science convention in Kuala Lumpur, he was also asked whether there was a need to appoint a second Finance Minister to help in drawing up the Budget, to which he quipped: "Do you have any proposals?"

Later yesterday, after visiting Proton's headquarters in Shah Alam, Dr Mahathir pointed out that there was no need to appoint a second Finance Minister as he had yet "to feel overloaded with work".

He added, jokingly: "I suspect that the Press community does not trust me running the Finance Ministry. They keep on asking me when we are going to make the appointment."

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