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MAHATHIR-FINANCE

FINANCE MINISTER MUST FINANCE SAVVY, CLEAN AND NON-CONTROVERSIAL

KUALA LUMPUR, June 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has yet to decide on the candidate for Finance Minister but says the person picked should be someone who knows "something about finance, be clean and not a controversial figure".

"He (the candidate) could be a politician, could be a non-politician, I don't know, I want to give myself the freedom to decide on something that I think is very important to us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he is yet to shortlist the candidates for the post, formerly held by Tun Daim Zainuddin, who resigned on June 1 after taking two months' leave prior to leaving the government.

The Prime Minister is currently assuming the post of Finance Minister.

He told reporters this after launching a book entitled "A Vision Realised -- The Transformation of a National Oil Corporation." The book is on the history of Petronas and its activities over the last 25 years.

Asked if he would continue to be Finance Minister, he said: "The duties of the Prime Minister are very heavy and so is the post of the Finance Minister, so I am trying to work out how to operate until I find a Minister of Finance."

Dr Mahathir said he was considering all possibilities on the appointment including the creation of a second Finance Minister's position, as was the case during the 1998 regional economic crisis.

Dr Mahathir also assumed the Finance Minister's portfolio then.

"I have to study the thing, it is a very serious appointment, I can't just give it to anybody I would have to spend a little bit of time evaluating," he said.

He also did not rule out the possibility of the new Finance Minister filling the vacancy of Treasurer-general for UMNO, which was also vacated by Daim.

Asked on speculation that there was a rift between him and Daim, he said there was no such rift.

"There was not rift, I think it was a friendly parting, he felt that maybe some people are not appreciating what he was doing and he thought it was time for him to leave the government."

Asked if Daim's house was raided (by the police), Dr Mahathir said he did not have any knowledge of this.

"No, not that I know of, I don't know if someone had done it but I certainly don't know anything about that," he added. -- BERNAMA

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