

05 JUN 2001

Mahathir-Finance

MAHATHIR HANDLES FINANCE & SPECIAL FUNCTIONS PORTFOLIOS FOR NOW

PUTRAJAYA, June 5 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he would temporarily handle the finance and special functions portfolios following the resignation of Tun Daim Zainuddin from all government posts.

"This morning, I have written to the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance that I am now acting as minister of finance," Dr Mahathir told reporters after a function at his office here.

The prime minister also confirmed that Tun Daim had also resigned as Umno treasurer.

Asked whether he would permanently hold the two portfolios, Dr Mahathir said he would only handle them temporarily prior the appointment of new people to the posts.

Dr Mahathir had previously been finance minister in late 1998 following the onset of the regional financial crisis then.

Asked on the criterion for one to become finance minister, Dr Mahathir said: "It must be somebody suitable to become minister of finance."

Dr Mahathir was also asked on speculation that former Bank Negara governor Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman, MP for Gua Musang Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Bank Negara governor assistant governor Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussein and Arab-Malaysian group's executive chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim are among possible candidates:

The prime minister replied: "I do not know, I will look at the list."

"I am still quite open and any suggestions from the press will be welcome," he said in jest.

To a question, he said Daim was no longer an Umno Supreme Council since he had resigned as Umno treasurer which was an appointed post.

"In the supreme council, he is not chosen, he is appointed and he has resigned, so he is no longer a council member," he said.

Asked whether he would act as finance minister long enough to table the 2002 Budget later this year, he said: "If I learn enough about finance, I will be the (finance) minister who will be having the (pre-budget) dialogue.

"At the moment, I am not confident yet," he added in lighter vein.

-- BERNAMA

MOT MR/SHY RYN