

05 JUL 2001

Mahathir-Appointment

MAHATHIR YET TO DECIDE WHO WILL BE FINANCE MINISTER

SHAH ALAM, July 5 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he has yet to make any decision who will be the Finance Minister.

"I suspect the press community don't trust me running the Finance Ministry," he said in jest, when responding to a question whether he will appoint a new finance minister soon.

He said people may not trust him when he has to attend Treasury-related functions like budget dialogues.

"Well, I'll try," he said after spending 90 minutes visiting Proton Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton's) medium volume factory at its main plant in Section 26 here today.

"When we make the appointment, we will make the announcement," he said.

Dr Mahathir is handling the finance portfolio since Tun Daim Zainuddin's resignation on June 1 pending appointment of a new Finance Minister.

"This could take one month, two months, three months time or one year," Dr Mahathir said.

On appointing a second Finance Minister, he said: "Anytime when I feel like it."

The prime minister said that at the moment he did not feel overloaded yet with Finance Ministry work.

He said he has several people to help him out in the ministry.

Mahathir-Appointment 3 Shah Alam

Asked about his June 28 meeting with Minardi F1 team principal Paul Stoddart, he said they, among other things, discussed possible future joint ventures between Malaysia and the team in producing local F1 drivers and engines.

They also discussed the chances of local F1 aspiring driver Alex Yoong being included in the Minardi team to race at Silverstone in England on July 15 and the need for Malaysia to raise RM19 million in sponsorship for Yoong's inclusion in the F1 race to materialise.

"Of course in future, we (the government) will not lose the opportunity to join hands with Minardi in producing more local drivers and engines for Formula 1 (race)," the prime minister said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would have to be patient as it was still a long way to go.

On demands for higher minimum wage by trade unions, especially those representing workers in the autoparts industry, he said the government would have to negotiate on this.

The prime minister expressed confidence that the unions would understand the government's situation given the prevailing close ties and constant dialogues between both sides.

In its memorandum for the 2001 dialogue with the International Trade and Industry Ministry, the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers said unions had demanded an 18 per cent upward wage adjustment for autopart industry workers.

-- BERNAMA

RIZ AFY RYN