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MAHATHIR-DAIM

NO NEED TO LOOK FOR CANDIDATES TO REPLACE DAIM, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, April 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says there is no need to look for candidates to replace Tun Daim Zainuddin as he has not resigned as Finance Minister.

"We will cross the bridge when we come (to it)...at the moment (there is) no idea about it (to look for a replacement). At this stage we have no plans to appoint a new Finance Minister because we have not reached that stage," the Prime Minister said.

Speaking to reporters after attending the Young African Leadership and Intellectual Dialogue at the Putra World Trade Centre here today, he said Daim had only taken a two-month leave.

When asked whether it was right for Daim to go on leave when the economic situation in the country was not so encouraging, Dr Mahathir said: "He is not leaving in the first place. He still goes to office. Only thing he is not attending Cabinet meetings or Umno Supreme Council meetings."

Asked whether Daim would resume work in time for the Umno General Assembly in June, Dr Mahathir said: "I think so."

At an earlier function in Genting Highlands today, Dr Mahathir had confirmed that Daim was on leave for two months.

However, Dr Mahathir declined to comment when asked by reporters whether this was a prelude to Daim resigning, saying, "That you've got to ask him."

"If you ask me and I answer, he might get angry," he said in response to newsreports that Daim had applied for three months' leave and that a Cabinet minister would be acting for him.

Dr Mahathir said Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz would represent Daim in the Cabinet.

"He has taken leave for two months and Nazri is now representing him in the Cabinet," the Prime Minister said after officiating the National Education Convention 2001 at the Aminuddin Baki Institute at Sri Layang, here.

Asked whether there was a need for an acting finance minister, Dr Mahathir said there was no need as he (Daim) was still in the office going through all the documents and letters despite being on leave.

Asked further what the reasons were for Daim to go on leave, Dr Mahathir said: "He could be tired, you people (media) disturb him a lot, asking questions endlessly and criticising him over the Malaysia Airlines issue." -- BERNAMA

MK AR MKO SHY