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PM dismisses speculation (HL)

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SUBANG, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today dismissed talk that Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin had resigned from the Cabinet.

Approached by reporters upon his return from Jakarta after attending the Group of 15 (G15) Summit, Dr Mahathir said he had not received any letter from Daim on the latter's purported resignation.

"I don't know. Did he say it?" he replied to questions on speculation that Daim would be resigning today.

Utusan Malaysia today front-paged a report that rumours were rife on Daim resigning.

When pointed out that the report was mere speculation, Dr Mahathir in jest said: "Oh, it's speculation. (You know) ... I never comment on speculation."

Asked whether he had received any indication from Daim, stating his intention to retire, Dr Mahathir said: "So far, there's nothing."

On Tuesday, Daim, when met after officiating at the Industrial Development Corp of South Africa investment conference dismissed rumours that he would be resigning.

Daim began his leave early last month but has been at work clearing files and at times attending functions on invitations from organisations and companies. His leave ended yesterday.

Meanwhile, Bernama reports that the Prime Minister's office has denied an AP-Dow Jones news wire report that Dr Mahathir's media conference upon his return from Jakarta today was "hastily called".

"It is not correct," the Prime Minister's assistant Press secretary Sufi Yusoff said.

The full text of the AP-Dow Jones newsflash read:

"Judging by hastily-called media conference around 0330 GMT for local media, PM Mahathir expected to make major announcement today; markets likely to be jittery amid mounting speculation (Tun) Daim (Zaindddin) may resign (as Finance Minister).

"While initial plan was for briefing exclusively for official Government-owned media, other local media organisations were invited less than one hour before it was due to start; foreign media not allowed to attend briefing, Mahathir holding media conference on return from G15 meeting in Jakarta. KLCI now down 0.1 per cent at 572.1."

Sufi clarified that Dr Mahathir's media conference mentioned in the AP-Dow Jones report was actually a normal media conference held every time he returned from an overseas trip and which was open to local media.

On this occasion the Prime Minister had returned from Jakarta where he had attended the Group of 15 Summit.

Sufi said it was not true local media organisations were invited less than an hour before the start of the media conference.

"The invitation was conveyed through the national news agency, Bernama, yesterday, May 31," he said.

He said the reason why only the official media was invited earlier was because the Prime Minister was expected to arrive at 1.15am today which warranted only a photo coverage of his arrival.

To this end, Bernama sent out a message to its subscribers at 2.44pm yesterday about Dr Mahathir's flight being scheduled to land at 1.15am.

But since the flight was rescheduled to land at 11am today, a media

conference was called for the local media - which was the norm and was nothing out of the ordinary, Sufi said.

When the Prime Minister's office confirmed that Dr Mahathir's time of arrival had been changed from 1.15am to 11am, Bernama sent out another message at 4.23pm yesterday.

The Prime Minister's change of flight schedule was also repeated in Bernama's daily news coverage schedule.

Sufi said as such, it was not correct for AP-Dow Jones to say the local media organisations were invited less than an hour before the start of Dr Mahathir's media conference.

He said it was also not correct to say that Dr Mahathir was expected to make a major announcement.

"Dow Jones' newsflash that the Prime Minister is expected to make a major announcement is pure speculation.

Such speculation and announcement without prior confirmation from this (PM's) office is irresponsible and hardly accurate," Sufi said.