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PM evaluating candidates (HL)

Patrick Sennyah; Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was in no hurry to appoint a new Finance Minister, adding that he would need more time to evaluate suitable candidates.

The Prime Minister, however, said the new Finance Minister must be someone who is non-controversial, knows about finance and is "clean".

He said he had not found anyone suitable yet and that the person could be a politician or non-politician.

"I don't know ... the person could be an entirely fresh face. I want to give myself the freedom to decide on something that I think is very important to us."

Former Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin resigned on June 1 after taking two months' leave. Dr Mahathir is now the acting Finance Minister.

Asked if he would continue holding the finance portfolio, he said the duties of the Prime Minister and Finance Minister were both heavy and he was trying to work out a way to handle both.

Dr Mahathir was speaking after launching a book entitled A Vision Realised - The Transformation of a National Oil Corporation, tracing the history of Petronas and its activities over the last 25 years.

Asked if the appointment would be made before the Umno general assembly next week, he said: "I don't want to be hurried. It is a very serious appointment and I cannot simply give it to anybody. I would have to spend more time evaluating."

On whether the new Finance Minister would also assume the post of Umno treasurer, he said it was possible as he had an open mind on the matter.

He also dismissed allegations that Daim's resignation was prompted by differences between them. "It was purely a friendly parting. He felt that maybe some people did not appreciate what he was doing and he (Daim) thought it was time for him to leave."

Dr Mahathir added that they were still good friends.