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PM to handle Finance (HL)

Patvinder Singh; Sajahan Waheed

PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he would temporarily handle the Finance and Special Functions portfolios previously held by Tun Daim Zainuddin who has resigned 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," he told reporters after a function at his office here.

The Prime Minister also confirmed that Daim had resigned as Umno treasurer the same day he left the Finance Ministry on Friday and was no longer a member of the party's supreme council.

On whether he had decided on Daim's replacement, Dr Mahathir said he was "still thinking about it".

He added that he would hold the two portfolios until they could be filled by others. He had held the Finance Minister's post in late 1998 during of the regional financial crisis.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on speculation that special economic adviser to the Prime Minister, Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman, Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Bank Negara assistant governor Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussein are among possible candidates for Finance Minister.

To this, he replied: "I do not know, I will look at the list. I am still quite open and any suggestions from the Press will be welcomed."

On the kind of candidate he would choose to be Finance Minister, he said: "He must be somebody suitable to become Finance Minister." Asked if a decision would be made before or after the Umno general assembly on June 21, Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said he did not know when and was "still searching".

On Daim's position in the Umno supreme council, Dr Mahathir said: "He was not elected, but appointed as Umno treasurer. So if he is not treasurer, he is not in (the supreme council)." However, he said, Daim would remain as the Merbok MP.

Asked whether he would chair the pre-Budget dialogue which would start soon, Dr Mahathir said in jest: "If I learn enough about finance, I will be the Minister who will be having the dialogue. At the moment, I am not confident yet."