

I still need a capable finance minister, says Mahathir

PUTRAJAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he still needs a finance minister or at least a second finance minister to help him manage the country's economy "if not to take over from me as finance minister, then maybe as my assistant."

"We used to have a second finance minister.

"This is an approach that we will choose because the duties of the finance minister are very heavy," said Dr Mahathir, who took over the portfolio after Tun Daim

Zainuddin resigned on June 1 last year.

Speaking in an interview with *Bernama* in his office, here, Dr Mahathir said he felt that the duties of finance minister were a big burden for him because he had also to shoulder the responsibilities of a prime minister.

Dr Mahathir said he had to find someone "truly suitable" for the job.

At the moment he is assisted by two deputies - Datuk Dr Shafie Mohamed Salleh and Datuk Chan Kong Choy - as well as two economic

advisers - former Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman and Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop.

Asked whether he had identified a candidate for the post, he said: "Not yet."

On whether the appointment would be made soon, he said: "I have not decided."

On the views of several parties and economic analysts that there was more transparency in the economy and better corporate management since he took over as finance minister, Dr

Mahathir said this was the public perception.

"It may have basis but even before this we wanted to manage the country's financial affairs in a transparent manner that can be seen by the people. But, sometimes it looked as though some parties had received special treatment and this raises questions.

"Now, we are reviewing the situation since there are more people involved in business, for example, the bumiputras. And they also have certain abilities.

"We feel that they should be given a chance and not limit the opportunities to those who have proven themselves.

"As such, the Government now gives contracts to many people who submit tenders, especially those with skills in certain areas," he said.

On the performance of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE), which had posted encouraging performance in the last two months, and the possibility of the Composite Index

breaching the 700 mark, he said:

"If investors do a rational study, without being influenced by factors like biased politics, I am confident they will find the Malaysian economy healthier than those of many other countries.

"If they want to see their investments bringing returns, they will invest in Malaysia. Our problem is that we receive bad press, that is, until today the foreign media still deliberately paints a bad picture of Malaysia," he said.