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Mahathir-Minister

SECOND FINANCE MINISTER MAY BE APPOINTED, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: E. Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today 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, it's also possible. This is an approach that we will choose because the duties of the finance minister are very heavy," said Dr Mahathir who took over as finance minister after Tun Daim Zainuddin resigned on June 1 this year.

Speaking in an interview with Bernama in Putrajaya, near 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 the prime minister.

The interview conducted by Bernama editor-in-chief Jaafar Hussin and assistant editor E.Sivabalan was aired in the "Wawancara BERNAMA dengan Perdana Menteri" programme over RTM and Astro tonight.

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

He is now assisted by two deputy finance ministers, namely Datuk Dr Shafie Mohamed Salleh and Datuk Chan Kong Choy. He also has two economic advisors, namely former Bank Negara governor Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman and Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop.

Asked whether he had identified the candidate for the post of finance minister or second finance minister, he said: "Not yet".

On whether the appointment would be made soon, he said "I've 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 financials 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 bumiputeras, and they also have certain abilities and we feel that they should be given a chance and not limit the opportunities to those who have proven themselves," he said.

As such, the government now gave contracts to many people who submitted tenders, especially those with skills in certain areas.

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 the investors do a rational study, without being influenced by factors like biased politics, I am confident that 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 get receive bad press, that is, until today the foreign media still deliberately paint a bad picture of Malaysia," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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