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Abu Hassan named new Selangor MB

Kamarul Yunus

DOMESTIC Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar was named the new Selangor menteri besar yesterday, but he needs to win a state assembly seat before he can assume the post.

For this, Abu Hassan has stepped down as a member of Parliament for Kuala Selangor while Permatang State Assemblyman Datuk Jamaluddin Adnan resigned from his post. They will swap constituencies when the by-elections are called for the parliamentary and state seats, respectively.

Abu Hassan also relinquished his federal ministerial post yesterday.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who announced this during a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, said the Election Commission will fix the date for the two by-elections.

He also said the Sultan of Selangor consented to the name of the candidate for the new menteri besar as endorsed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is currently on a week-long official visit to Malawi, Botswana and South Africa.

Yesterday's announcement came more than two weeks after Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib resigned as menteri besar on April 14. Muhammad is awaiting trial in August on two charges of failing to declare currency equivalent to RM2.4 million found in his luggage at the Brisbane International Airport on December 22 last year and making a false declaration pertaining to the cash upon his entry into Australia.

Anwar dismissed suggestions that there were problems in choosing Abu Hassan as there are several other candidates that can be picked from the existing Selangor State Executive Council (Exco) line-up or state assemblymen.

"There is no problem ... Abu Hassan is experienced. He has been working with the Federal Government for quite long and he is also the Selangor Umno liaison deputy chairman.

"Thus, this makes him a more senior, experienced and able (candidate) to lead and administer Selangor," he added.

Asked whether the appointment of Abu Hassan means that the Selangor state exco members and state assemblymen were incapable of becoming a menteri besar, Anwar said: "This does not arise. We have to choose a Selangor state assemblyman. So we chose Abu Hassan to contest to enable him to qualify to become the Selangor menteri besar."

Asked if the Government is confident Abu Hassan can ensure political stability in Selangor, Anwar said the party (Umno) and Selangor State Government will work as one team.

"So, the issue does not arise. Furthermore, Umno members have pledged to respect the prime minister's decision and they will accept and support whoever is appointed as Selangor menteri besar.

"In fact, Abu Hassan has also been able to solve party's crisis and problems in Selangor previously," he said.

He urged voters in the Permatang and Kuala Selangor constituencies to support and choose the two Umno candidates in the coming by-elections.

Asked whether there will be a Cabinet reshuffle following the vacancy in the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs portfolio, Anwar said that is up to the Prime Minister to decide.

"I leave it to the wisdom of the prime minister," he said. In the mean time, Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed will be the acting Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister.

Asked who will take charge of Selangor during the transition period - from now until Abu Hassan is formally appointed menteri besar - Anwar said as the prime minister had informed the state secretary and the relevant authorities, the state's administrative work will run as usual.

"At the moment, there is no major decision or policy to be made or new approvals that need major decision or change in policy," he added.

Earlier, Anwar had a 40-minute audience with the Sultan of Selangor in Shah Alam to inform him of Dr Mahathir's candidate for the new Selangor menteri besar.

The Sultan told reporters later he had consented to the name in the letter signed by the prime minister.

"I agree with the name in the letter and the issue over the appointment of the menteri besar is settled," he said, adding that he wanted the new menteri besar to be clean, serve sincerely, selflessly and put the people's interest first.

Dr Mahathir, who is now in Malawi, had an audience with the Sultan at Istana Selangor in Kuala Lumpur on April 21. However, the prime minister had then said he needed more time to decide.

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