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Abu Hassan picked as new MB (HL)

Ramlan Said; Saodah Elias

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar was picked to replace Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib as Selangor Menteri Besar in a surprise announcement today.

The decision, which is unprecedented in the appointment of a Menteri Besar, saw Abu Hassan resigning as a Federal Minister and relinquishing his Parliament seat to contest a State seat.

However, his appointment as Menteri Besar is subject to him winning the State seat. He will contest in a by-election in Permatang, vacated today by Datuk Jamaluddin Adnan who will now stand in a Parliamentary by-election in Kuala Selangor.

Jamaluddin had at one time served as Abu Hassan's political secretary. The Election Commission will fix the nomination and polling dates for both contests soon.

The announcement was made by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at a Press conference at the Prime Minister's Department. Anwar had earlier met the Sultan of Selangor in Shah Alam where he handed a letter from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the selection of Abu Hassan.

Abu Hassan submitted his resignation letter today addressed to the Prime Minister to his chief private secretary Datuk Abdul Aziz Ismail with a copy to Anwar. Dr Mahathir is away on a tour of Malawi, Botswana and South Africa.

"We hope he will win convincingly in the by-election," Anwar said, adding that he believed voters in the constituency would show their support.

Today's announcement ended almost three weeks of speculation on who would replace Muhammad who resigned on April 14. Muhammad is facing two charges at the Brisbane magistrate's court for failing to declare the equivalent of RM2.4 million while leaving the Brisbane International airport for New Zealand last Dec 22 and for making a false declaration.

Asked whether Dr Mahathir had given reasons for selecting Abu Hassan, Anwar said: "He is experienced and has served as a Federal Minister for quite some time. Also, he is the State Umno liaison committee deputy chairman. These show that he is someone very senior, experienced and has the capability to lead and administer the State."

Anwar said besides being one of the most senior politicians in Selangor, Abu Hassan had also demonstrated his capability when he resolved various problems and crises affecting the State.

Asked who would replace Abu Hassan as Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister, Anwar said Dr Mahathir had agreed that Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed would serve as acting minister.

On whether a Cabinet reshuffle was on the cards, Anwar said the matter would be the prerogative of the Prime Minister.

Responding to a question on who would lead Selangor in the interim period, Anwar said: "Dr Mahathir has informed the State Secretary and the Government that the administration should continue as usual.

"Only that no decisions should be made on policy matters, new approvals and major things like that..."

Speaking to reporters earlier today, the Sultan said as far as he was concerned the appointment of the Menteri Besar had been resolved.

"I fully agree with the Prime Minister's choice and support his

decision."

The Sultan said he felt the candidate was the best person for the post as he had all the qualities to become an effective Menteri Besar.

"He is clean, honest and trustworthy and I am confident that he will be able to discharge his duties well."

Asked what advice he would give to the new Menteri Besar, the Ruler said he must exercise greater care when carrying out his duties, be honest and sincere, must not tell lies and, most importantly, he must be trustworthy, especially when dealing in matters of public interest.

"He should also be more careful in managing the State's funds and make a greater effort to be closer to the people," the Ruler said, adding he felt very strongly about Menteris Besar who left the people to fend for themselves and disregarded their feelings.

Asked when the new Menteri Besar would be sworn in, the Sultan said there was no hurry.

"I am leaving for London (tomorrow) and now that the candidate has been chosen, the swearing-in can be done later," he said.

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