

09/01/1999

Abdullah is new Deputy PM (HL)

Ashraf Abdullah; Tony Emmanuel; Marhalim Abbas

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was today appointed Deputy Prime Minister in a Cabinet reshuffle announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Abdullah, 59, was also given the Home Ministry.

Minister of Special Functions responsible for economic development Tun Daim Zainuddin was reappointed Finance Minister. He first held the post between June 1984 and March 1991 when he left the Cabinet.

He was made Special Functions Minister in June last year. The Prime Minister said Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed retains the post of Second Finance Minister.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar succeeds Abdullah while Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha takes over the defence portfolio.

Dr Mahathir, who announced this after chairing a three-hour monthly Umno Supreme Council meeting, also announced the promotion of Deputy Home Minister Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said the new appointments would take effect after the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar had given his consent.

He said the decision to appoint a Deputy Prime Minister was taken following the council's decision to defer party elections scheduled for the middle of the year.

This, he said, was because council members did not want a top-level party election too close to the general election which would be held by next year. The current term of Parliament expires in April next year.

Dr Mahathir came under mounting pressure to appoint a Deputy Prime Minister after Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was removed from the Cabinet on Sept 2 for alleged moral misconduct.

While Abdullah's appointment as DPM was widely speculated, it was the handing over of the Home Ministry to him that caught people by surprise.

The important ministry had been under the Prime Minister since 1986 when DPM and Home Minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam resigned from the Cabinet.

The appointment is seen as a vote of confidence in Abdullah, a bureaucrat turned politician who hails from a well-respected religious and political family in Penang.

Dr Mahathir also announced the appointment of Umno Supreme Council member Senator Datuk Ibrahim Ali as Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

Six deputy ministers are also involved in the reshuffle. Deputy Human Resources Minister Datuk Kadir Sheikh Fadzir is now Deputy Home Minister. Taking over from Kadir at the Human Resources Ministry is Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Dr Affifuddin Omar.

Datuk Mohamed Nazri Aziz, who is Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, has been made Deputy Finance Minister.

The other Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Dr Ibrahim Saad, assumes the post of Deputy Transport Minister, taking over from Datuk Mohd Ali Rustam, who becomes Deputy Health Minister.

Deputy Health Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Othman returns to the Prime Minister's Department.

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