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It's just rumours, says Khalil

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Pahang Assemblymen paid tribute to Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob at the State Assembly in Kuantan today amid speculations that he will return to Kuala Lumpur as a Cabinet minister.

Khalil, however, told reporters the speculations were just rumours.

And in Shah Alam, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Sabbaruddin Chik, also mentioned in possible changes to the Cabinet and Umno management, insisted that he was healthy and denied suggestions linking his future in the Cabinet to his supposedly poor health.

"Please stop asking about my health," Bernama quoted him as saying.

"I thank the many people who are concerned about my health but I'm healthy. But if you keep asking me about my health, I may eventually fall ill."

Sabbaruddin quashed talks of a Cabinet reshuffle involving him and a few other Umno ministers as "mere speculation by the Press".

"It is a known fact that only Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has prerogative over the matter," he told reporters.

Sabbaruddin said no one could correctly guess what was on the Prime Minister's mind apart from making mere speculation.

"I don't know how the speculation came about and it was linked to my poor health," he said.

"I do not recall making any statement on the matter."

Sabbaruddin said he was healthy enough to carry out official duties like chairing his ministry's weekly meeting yesterday and keeping his date to officiate at today's function.

Also, Sabbaruddin's office continued the practice of informing the Press of his programmes, including those lined up until May 30.

At the Pahang State Assembly, Ishak Muhamad (BN-Bepar) hailed Khalil's leadership while Abdul Fatah Abdullah (BN-Padang Tengku) claimed Khalil was his "political idol".

"If this is my last State Assembly with him (Khalil), I do not know whether I will still be elected wakil rakyat again," Fatah said, "but I am proud to be given a chance to serve him."

Azizan Yaakob (BN-Pulau Tawar) cited Khalil's influential role in Barisan Nasional's victory in the Sabah election.

"His expertise is much needed at national level," he said.

Datuk Mohd Sarit Yusoh (BN-Semantan) said Khalil was a special leader and "chief salesman" of the State, using his abilities, including playing golf and singing, to attract investors to Pahang.

Sarit noticed the qualities through his acquaintance with Khalil and from stories told to him by old friends of the Menteri Besar.

Debating the motion of thanks to the Sultan of Pahang for opening the Assembly, Sarit said since becoming the Menteri Besar in 1986, Khalil succeeded in transforming Pahang from an agro-based to an industrialised State on par with West Coast States.

The strategic move by the Pahang Government in acquiring the majority stake in Rashid Hussain Bhd was commendable.

Khalil deserved the title of "Pahang Corporate Hero", he added.

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