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Kadir and Khalil appointed ministers

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DEPUTY Home Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir replaces Datuk Sabaruddin Chik as Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister while Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob takes over as Information Minister from Datuk Mohamed Rahmat.

The resignations of Sabbaruddin and Mohamed took effect yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

They had submitted their resignation letters to him two weeks ago.

"The ministers who resigned from their posts have carried out their duties well. But in view of their resignations, we have to name the replacements," he said at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur.

In announcing the second Cabinet reshuffle this year, Dr Mahathir said Mohamed and Sabbaruddin did not give any reasons for their decision.

Asked about Sabbaruddin's statement on Wednesday that he was asked to resign, Dr Mahathir said: "Sabbaruddin saw me and said he would like to resign. And no, it is not because of health reasons".

"He is quite all right and a lot of other people his age could still work," he said.

In view of Khalil's appointment as Information Minister, Dr Mahathir said, Pelangai state assemblyman and state executive councillor Datuk Adnan Yaakob will replace him as Menteri Besar of Pahang.

The Prime Minister also announced the appointment of Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid as Deputy Home Minister in place of Abdul Kadir. Azmi's previous post is in turn assumed by Information Ministry parliamentary secretary Datuk Shafie Apdal.

Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia, president of Sabah Barisan Nasional component party Akar, is meanwhile named Minister in the Prime Minister's Department. He replaces Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, who resigned last February to contest in the Sabah state elections.

Both Pandikar Amin and Khalil will be sworn in as senators on May 24 to enable them to take up the posts. The appointment of the ministers and deputy ministers will take effect on May 25, after being sworn in before the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Dr Mahathir said Khalil will also replace Sabbaruddin as Umno secretary-general, while Mohamed remains as Barisan Nasional secretary-general.

Asked if the changes in the Cabinet are meant to pave the way for a stronger government to face the polls, he said: "Well, it (the Government) has always been in a strong position but we have to make changes."

On whether there would be further changes to the Cabinet, he said: "I won't be able to tell you. I have no idea yet. When the time comes, you can suggest to me."

As for his advice to the younger leaders, the Prime Minister said: "They must show that they have the stamina".

"They have to accept that it takes time. It took me 18 years in the party to become a Member of Parliament and another 10 years before I became a minister.

"I became the Prime Minister at the age of 56. It takes a long time. We all take a long time."

Asked when the country can expect a general election, Dr Mahathir said:

"As you know, it is the government which decides the date of the election. It is not a fixed date as in some countries. We will make an assessment of the climate, school holidays... all kinds of things."

The general election is due before June next year.