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Several Umno leaders likely to be involved in Cabinet reshuffle

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Speculation is rife that a number of senior Umno leaders will be involved in changes to the Cabinet and to the management of Umno.

It is said that Information Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Rahmat may be dropped from the Cabinet.

Mohamed is into his second stint as Information Minister. He also doubled up as Umno secretary-general from 1987 to 1996.

Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob and Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia, president of Sabah-based Akar Bersatu, are expected to be appointed to the Cabinet.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had confirmed during his visit to Sabah last week that Pandikar Amin would be given a Federal post.

Pandikar Amin is expected to be appointed a Senator for this purpose.

Sources said if this was going to be a straight-forward swap with another Sabah leader Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, Pandikar Amin would be made Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

This was the post held by Chong, president of the Liberal Democratic Party, before he quit to contest the Kudat seat in the March 12-13 Sabah election. Chong has since been made a State Minister.

Pandikar Amin, a State Minister in the previous Barisan Nasional Government in Sabah, did not contest the election, making way for an Umno candidate in his Tempasuk seat.

Khalil, who acted as BN's director of operations for the Sabah election, is expected to be made a Senator and appointed Information Minister.

In addition, Khalil, 61, is likely to be appointed Umno secretary-general, replacing Datuk Seri Sabbaruddin Chik.

It is unclear whether Sabbaruddin will remain in the Cabinet. He has been the Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister since the inception of the ministry in 1989.

Sabbaruddin had reportedly confirmed on Saturday that a minor Cabinet reshuffle was imminent and that it might involve him. This heightened speculation.

As for Khalil, he was appointed Menteri Besar in 1986. Prior to that, he was Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (from 1984), and Deputy Education Minister (from 1982).

Khalil served in the Foreign Ministry from 1963 to 1974 after which he became general-manager of the Jengka Development Authority. In 1978, Khalil won a Pahang State seat.

In Pahang, State Exco member Datuk Adnan Yaakob has been mentioned as a possible replacement as Menteri Besar.

The Prime Minister, however, did not shed any light on the likely changes, beyond saying that a Cabinet reshuffle was nothing unusual.

"Sometime or other, we will have a Cabinet reshuffle, maybe before or after election ...," Dr Mahathir told reporters today, when asked to comment on the speculation in the Press.

Dr Mahathir said some people had the tendency to speculate on many things.

"These are rumours and as you know, they speculate on anything. Sometimes what they say can happen like predictions on the general election.

"(They predict) if not next month, then the month after, if not then the

month after that ... one day you will be right," he said.

"So you can have your rumours but I cannot confirm them."

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