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Cabinet-Reshuffle

TWO MINISTERS DROPPED, PAHANG GETS NEW MB

KUALA LUMPUR, May 20 (Bernama) -- Two senior ministers -- Datuk Seri Mohamed Rahmat and Datuk Seri Sabbaruddin Chik -- were dropped from the Cabinet and a new Menteri Besar for Pahang appointed in a reshuffle announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob replaces Mohamed as Information Minister. Senior Pahang Executive Councillor Datuk Adnan Yaakob has been named the new Menteri Besar of Pahang.

Khalil has also been appointed Secretary-General of Umno, succeeding Sabbaruddin.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Kadir Sheikh Fadzir was promoted to take over from Sabbaruddin as Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister.

Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia, president of Sabah Barisan Nasional component party Akar, was named Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

Both he and Khalil will be sworn in as senators on May 24 to enable them to take up the appointment.

Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid took over from Kadir as Deputy Home Minister, while Parliamentary Secretary to the Information Ministry Datuk Shafie Apdal moved up as deputy minister to succeed Azmi.

Dr Mahathir in a news conference at his office said the Yang di-Pertuan Agong had consented to the appointment of the three ministers and that of Khalil and Pandikar Amin as senators.

The appointment of ministers and deputy ministers will take effect on May 25 after they are sworn in before the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Dr Mahathir said Sabbaruddin had also resigned as Umno Secretary-General to be replaced by Khalil while Mohamed would remain as Secretary-General of the Barisan Nasional.

He said the Cabinet changes were made following the resignation of Mohamed and Sabbaruddin as well as Datuk Chong Kah Kiat who relinquished his post as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in February to contest the Sabah state election.

Answering a question, he said: "Perhaps we can regard these changes as a move to strengthen the government machinery".

"The ministers who resigned from their posts have also carried out their duties well. But in view of their resignations, we have to make replacements," he said.

Asked whether the opposition would make speculations over the matter, the prime minister said that they would do so.

Dr Mahathir said that Mohamed and Sabbaruddin tendered their letters of resignation two weeks ago.

Asked by a reporter about Sabbaruddin's remark yesterday that he was asked to resign, the prime minister replied: "Sabbaruddin saw me and said he would like to resign. And no, it is not because of health reasons".

Sabbaruddin reportedly said on Saturday that he had kidney problems but stressed it was not serious.

Dr Mahathir said Sabbaruddin, 57, was "quite all right" and that a lot of other people his age could still work.

The prime minister said that Mohamed and Sabbaruddin did not give any reasons for wanting to resign.

Dr Mahathir said that only Chong had stated that he wanted to

relinquish his post because he wanted to contest in the last Sabah election.

Asked if the minor changes in the Cabinet had paved the way for a stronger government to face the polls, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, it (the government) has always been in a strong position to win elections but changes had to be made sometime."

Asked if 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."

When asked how he as prime minister would define the role of a younger leader given the long process of grooming a Cabinet minister, Dr Mahathir 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 (Umno) to become a Member of Parliament and another 10 years before I became a Minister.

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

He said the younger leaders would have to learn about the process of government.

The prime minister was also asked about the factors that he would take into account before calling for the general election, due before June next year.

"Well, what is convenient to the government party because as you know, it is the government which decides the date of the election. It is not a fixed date as in some countries," he said.

He said the government would make an assessment of the "climate, school holidays...all kinds of things will be taken into consideration".

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