

# Mahathir hints at possibility of minor cabinet reshuffle, appointment of new faces

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*Utusan Malaysia's* exclusive report on Monday sparked off speculation of a cabinet reshuffle. Quoting a source, the report said the reshuffle would be announced within the week and involve half its members, deputy ministers and parliamentary secretaries.

The reshuffle is expected to feature the re-establishment of a Law Ministry. According to another source, the government may also be setting up a Federal Territory Ministry. Umno executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor who was appointed senator on Dec 13 will be heading it.

It was speculated former Selangor Menteri Besar and Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib will be given a cabinet portfolio. The last time the cabinet was reshuffled was on May 20 last year.

When asked about the report, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hinted that there will be a minor reshuffle involving members of the government administration, but denied that there will be a major reshuffle affecting cabinet ministers.

He said there is no intention of setting up any new ministries as the 24 ministries in the cabinet are good enough for the present. However, he said there is a possibility of new faces in the administrative level in positions such as parliamentary secretaries.

Still hogging the headlines this week was the controversy over the demands of Malaysian Chinese Organisations Elections Appeals Committee (Suqiu). Criticisms this week shifted from the so-called extremist demands to

the move by Umno Youth to call for a dialogue with Suqiu.

Several Umno veterans were reported to be against the dialogue. Party veteran Tan Sri Aziz Tapa said the dialogue is unnecessary as the rights of bumiputras are already clearly stated in the Federal Constitution and thus should not be questioned by any party.

"This is not the place for Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein to be a hero. Suqiu must withdraw its demands," said Aziz.

Hishammuddin, who is Umno Youth chief, had proposed a dialogue with Suqiu to end the controversy surrounding its petition.

Another veteran, Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah, said: "Holding discussions with Suqiu will look as if we are surrendering to them. Besides, Suqiu has no right to make extreme demands."

Federation of Peninsular Malaysia Malay Students (GPMS) president Datuk Suhaimi Ibrahim also criticised Hishammuddin in proposing

the dialogue, saying he was just "trying to be smart".

"The issue should have been nipped in the bud when it first reared its head. It is over a year already. The issue has flared up and the Malays are getting angrier over it."

*Berita Harian*, in its editorial on the same day as *Utusan's* report, said that there will only be room for discussions with Suqiu if the sensitive points in the demands are dropped.

In its editorial on Monday, *Utusan* called on all parties to cool off and take the advice of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to stop the racial rhetoric arising from the Suqiu 17-point demands and 100-point counter demands by the GPMS. This is to avoid tension and confrontation among the different races in the country.

On the other hand, the problem should not be left as it is. Sincere efforts should be made to find a long term solution to the problem. The main priority is peace and stability of the country.