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First woman A-G (HL)

Ramlan Said; Carolyn Hong

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Datuk Ainum Mohd Saaid is expected to be appointed the next Attorney-General - the first woman to hold the post.

Ainum, currently the Securities Commission deputy chief executive, will take over the post from Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah whose contract expires at the end of this month.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said an official announcement would be made soon.

He was asked to confirm a news report of a Cabinet reshuffle which would create the post of Law Minister who would also be the Attorney-General.

"Nowadays, the Government is being taken over by women, the men are too lazy to learn, they are too busy demonstrating, so we don't have enough candidates," he joked.

The current Solicitor-General is also a woman, Datuk Heliliah Mohd Yusof.

Dr Mahathir said he was satisfied with Mohtar's performance, adding he did not discount the possibility of him being given other posts.

Ainum's appointment has been widely speculated since late last year when Mohtar's contract was about to expire.

However, the rumours died down when his term was extended twice, for six months each, up to the end of this year.

Ainum is expected to take office next month.

With this appointment, she will return to head the A-G's Chambers which she had served for 26 years from July 1970 to January 1996.

The A-G's post is one which has generated a great deal of controversy, both for Mohtar as well as his predecessors. Besides being the legal adviser to the Government, the A-G is also the Public Prosecutor who holds vast powers to decide on prosecutions.

Highly regarded as a no-nonsense officer, Ainum's last post in the A-G's Chambers was as the parliamentary draftsman. This is the third highest-ranking post in the A-G's Chambers after the A-G and Solicitor-General.

She had also briefly held the post of head of prosecution from October 1994 to March 1995.

From July 1990 to October 1991, she was seconded to the World Bank as a counsel in the private sector development group. She had also held the position of Treasury Solicitor in the Finance Ministry.

Ainum left the service in February 1996 to join the Securities Commission as the director of market supervision.

Four months later, she left to join the private sector, and was the Metrojaya Bhd executive director and chief executive officer up to 1999.

On April 1, 1999, she rejoined the Securities Commission as a member and deputy chief executive. The latter is a newly created post. She was in charge of market supervision and enforcement of the Securities Commission's rules and regulations.

The prosecution department, under her supervision, had in the last couple of years shown its teeth by embarking on a series of high-profile prosecutions including against top directors of public-listed companies.

She holds a LLB (Hons) from the University of Singapore and Masters in Law from the Vrije Universitet in Brussels, Belgium, in 1976.

Ainum's appointment puts an end to speculation that the Government would appoint a political A-G, returning to the days when the post was held by a Law Minister.

When contacted, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said the Government had great faith in Ainum carrying out the heavy responsibilities as a Public Prosecutor and legal adviser to the Government.

"This is a great change in the leadership of a department pertaining to law and order and administration of justice," he said.

He also said as the first woman A-G, her task was even "more onerous" but he believed that she would be able to shoulder it.

Asked about Mohtar, Rais declined to confirm if he would return to the judiciary or be appointed elsewhere. Mohtar was a High Court judge before becoming A-G in 1994. He is now on leave.

"I am sure that with his service, his future will be augmented by other positive developments," Rais said.

Bar Council president Sulaiman Abdullah, who was Ainum's university mate in the University of Singapore, said she was a very bright student.

"Since she joined the service, she has been known for her very incisive advice and will serve the Government very well as its legal adviser," he said, adding it was also good that the Government has appointed a woman.

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