

PM hints at announcing Cabinet reshuffle in a few days

By **HAMISAH HAMID**

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says he may announce the anticipated reshuffle of the Cabinet before the Chinese New Year, noting that it will not be a major exercise.

No new ministry will be created, he added.

"You know me, I don't just sack people... it is very destructive," he told reporters in Kuala Lumpur after attending the National Unity and Social Development Ministry's Hari Raya gathering.

"Just imagine. when you go to your office, suddenly your boss says that you are sacked. How do you feel?"

The Prime Minister had confirmed talk of a Cabinet reshuffle earlier this month upon his return from an official visit to Myanmar.

On whether the exercise would be announced before Chinese New Year on January 24, he said: "God willing".

Asked if the new Cabinet line-up would be announced by his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi while he is in Japan later this week, he said: "It is possible".

Dr Mahathir will leave for a five-day working visit to Japan tomorrow.

Pressed for hints on the new Cabinet line-up, he

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said: "You wait (and) see".

And again on how many ministries would be involved in the reshuffle, the Prime Minister said: "I can't say it. I have to submit this to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah) first. So it is not nice, protocol-wise."

It has been widely speculated that new ministries, possibly a Federal Territory Ministry and a Women's Ministry, might be cre-

ated as part of the Cabinet reshuffle.

Dr Mahathir also dismissed suggestions that he has difficulty deciding on the new line-up, which was why the announcement is delayed.

"No, it is not difficult at all. I am (simply) pressed for time... I'm hardly at the office and when I'm in the office, I have visitors."

He also said he has yet to decide on who will replace Datuk Seri Dr Abdul Hamid Othman who resigned as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department early this month.