

RESHUFFLE ON

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Cabinet changes imminent but Dr M declines to reveal details

By SA'ODAH ELIAS

SHAH ALAM: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad confirmed yesterday that a Cabinet reshuffle was imminent.

However, asked when the announcement would be made, he said: "*Insyallah*, (God willing) hopefully soon."

Pressed for the exact date of the announcement on the changes, he said he needed more time to think things over.

"This is a government, we need to make an in-depth study. These things we cannot take lightly," he told a news conference at the RMAF base in Subang on his return from a three-day working visit to Myanmar.

Talks have been rife of an impending reshuffle over the past two months. Many political pundits

have speculated that there would be several new faces in the Cabinet.

Among those said to be the likely new faces are Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and party executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor.

Muhammad is tipped to be a Minister in the Prime Minister's Department while Tengku Adnan is said to be either the Minister or Deputy Minister of the new Federal Territory Ministry.

Wanita Umno deputy chief and Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Shahriyat Jalil is also tipped to be alleviated to the Cabinet.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, declined to give details

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Dr M: Give me the chance to think things over

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when asked if any existing minister would be dropped or whether more women would be appointed to the Cabinet.

He said he needed to think things over thoroughly because a Cabinet reshuffle was a serious matter affecting the country and one which warranted very careful study.

Asked if he might announce the reshuffle after this week's Cabinet meeting (today), or before the end of the week, he replied:

"I don't know yet. I have to attend the meeting and the Cabinet may have its own views.

"If it is (the announcement is made) at the end of the month or before the end of the year, it is about right. Give me the chance to think things over. This is a serious matter, not like forming a replanting committee."

On whether the reshuffle would be a major one, the Prime Minister said it depended on one's perspective.

"If you compare it to a minor one, then this is going to be major. But if you are to compare it to a major one, then it will be minor," he said.

On speculation that the coming reshuffle would affect some ministers from Umno who might be asked to concentrate on party duties, Dr Mahathir said it remained to be seen.

Minister in the Prime Min-

ister's Department Datuk Abdúl Hamid Othman, who announced his resignation on Friday, cited plans to concentrate on work to unite the *ummah* (Muslim community) for his decision.

Dr Mahathir said although Abdul Hamid was no longer in the Cabinet, he could still contribute to the Government in other ways.

He joked when Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin arrived while the news conference was proceeding.

"They (the reporters) say that your portfolios have been changed," he told them.