

19/11/2001

A-G to quit on Jan 1 (HL)

Carolyn Hong

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The Government has accepted Datuk Ainum Mohd Saaid's wish to step down as Attorney-General for health reasons.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said today Ainum will quit on Jan 1, exactly one year after her appointment.

"She has informed me and the Prime Minister and I had discussed the matter with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad." Rais said when contacted.

"We respect her wish."

The New Sunday Times reported today that Ainum was believed to have tendered her resignation because of a long-standing thyroid condition which forced her to take medical leave in September.

Rais said while Ainum had expressed her wish to resign, the formal process of tendering a letter of resignation would take place after he meets her tomorrow.

They are meeting to discuss a number of things, he said, and "the rest will follow after that", including an official announcement.

"The Government appreciates her position pertaining to her health. We deeply appreciate her service, viewing in the light of the performance of past A-Gs, even though one year is comparatively short," he said.

Ainum, 55, told reporters last week that she had taken a month's leave in September for medical reasons but returned to work after two-and-a-half weeks.

At that time, she had also said her health was still not good but she was trying to manage.

Asked about persistent rumours that she was under investigation over duties performed when she was the Securities Commission deputy chief executive, Rais dismissed them.

"I categorically say that there is no investigation against her, none whatsoever in the past and at present. She leaves the service without any pigmentation of a stain.

"It's purely for health reasons."

Over the last few months, the rumours continued to surface even after the Securities Commission issued a statement denying any investigation, and after Rais had cleared the air.

He declined to say if Ainum would be moving on to another post. There was speculation that she would become a Federal Court judge, like her predecessor Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah.

However, Chief Justice Tan Sri Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah yesterday said he was not aware of any move to assign Ainum to the Bench.

Rais also declined to disclose Ainum's successor or to confirm that three names were being considered.

They are said to be a High Court judge and two high-ranking officers in the Judicial and Legal Service.

He said he needed to hold discussions with several quarters first before making any announcement.

He also said his endeavour now was to ensure that the A-G's Chambers continued to be fair and resilient, in terms of prosecution and investigation.

Ainum, the nation's first woman A-G, assumed the post on Jan 1 on a two-year contract.

She is widely regarded as a person of integrity and intellect, and is

said to be firm in her running of the Chambers.

She had previously served in the Chambers for 26 years from July 1970 to January 1996. Her last post in the Chambers was Parliamentary draftsman, the third highest-ranking post after the A-G and Solicitor-General.

A University of Singapore graduate, she also had a stint in the World Bank and worked in the private sector for a time, serving as the chief executive officer of Metrojaya Bhd.

Her duties at the Securities Commission included market supervision and enforcement.

The prosecution department, under her supervision, had shown its teeth by undertaking a series of high-profile prosecutions.

hcarol@nstp.com.my

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