

15 JAN 2001

Mahathir-Reshuffle

CABINET RESHUFFLE WON'T BE MAJOR, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said that the anticipated cabinet reshuffle will not be a major one.

"I already said it. You know me. I don't just sack people as it is very destructive. Just imagine when you go to your office and your boss says that you are sacked, how do you feel?", he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after attending a Hari Raya gathering organised by the National Unity and Social Development Ministry, here.

Pressed to specify how many ministries would be involved in the reshuffle, Dr Mahathir 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."

Queried on whether he had submitted any letter regarding the cabinet reshuffle to the King today, he replied in the negative.

"No letter submitted. We called on the Agong and have lunch together and toured the King's gallery," the prime minister said.

His majesty, Dr Mahathir and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and several ministers visited the Galeri Diraja Sultan Abdul Aziz in Kampung Jawa in Klang today.

Asked when he would announce the reshuffle, Dr Mahathir said it would be soonest as possible.

Responding to a reporter's remark that the delay in announcing the reshuffle had caused people to speculate, he said: "You can guess as much as you like. It doesn't make any difference."

Asked whether the announcement would be made before the Chinese New Year which falls on Jan 24, he said: "InsyaAllah (God willing)."

On whether changes in the cabinet line-up would be announced by Abdullah while the prime minister is away in Japan this week, Dr Mahathir said: "It is also possible."

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to visit Japan for a working visit from Jan 17-21.

Asked whether it was a difficult task for him to reshuffle the cabinet, he said: "No, it is not difficult at all."

On the possibility of a new ministry being set up handle women's affairs, Dr Mahathir just shook his head and smilingly said: "I am satisfied with the present (cabinet) set up."

Questioned on the replacement for Datuk Seri Dr Abdul Hamid Othman who resigned as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department early this month, Dr Mahathir said he had yet to make a decision on the matter.

He was also queried on the absence of Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman from her ministry's function today.

"She is really sick," Dr Mahathir said.

On the possibility that Siti Zaharah was sulking over talk that she would be affected by the reshuffle, he said: "She is ill. Please don't make fun... ..if you doubt it, please check with (National Unity and Social Development Deputy Minister Dr Tiki anak) Lafe.

-- BERNAMA

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