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Gani Patail to be next A-G (HL)

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Datuk Abdul Gani Patail, head of the Attorney-General's Chambers prosecution division, will take over as Attorney-General on Jan 1.

He succeeds Datuk Seri Ainum Mohd Saaid, who tendered her letter of resignation today, citing health reasons.

Announcing this today, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said Gani would assume the duties of the A-G once Ainum goes on leave after clearing a few matters.

Rais said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had agreed to the arrangement.

Gani, 46, is from Lahad Datu, Sabah. He joined the A-G's Chambers as deputy public prosecutor upon graduating from Universiti Malaya in 1980.

He had also held the post of Commissioner of Law Revision, and head of the Advisory and International Division of the Chambers.

He shot to prominence in 1998 when he led the prosecution team in the corruption and sodomy trial of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He has also prosecuted other high-profile cases, including that of a corruption charge against former Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan in 1993, the sodomy case of Anwar's adopted brother Sukma Darmawan Sasmitaat Madja and the Al-Ma'unah treason trial.

A prosecutor with an authoritative bearing, Gani's name had frequently cropped up as potential A-G.

When contacted by the New Straits Times, he declined comment as he had to attend the funeral of a family member but said he might make a statement tomorrow.

Rais, who met Ainum earlier today, said she was resigning over a troublesome thyroid condition, dismissing speculation that she was under pressure to step down.

"It's purely on health. The speculation is baseless. Even ministers resign, what more officers?" he said at a Press conference.

He said Ainum, 55, was 'vibrant, energetic and resourceful' when she assumed the A-G's post on Jan 1 this year, but in the last few months, her illness had become noticeable and it was hard on her.

Ainum had gone on medical leave in September.

Rais said she had wanted to resign for some time but because of certain outstanding matters, Dr Mahathir only agreed to allow her to step down on Jan 1 next year.

When contacted, Ainum confirmed she was leaving purely because of health reasons.

"I assure you that it's that," she said, declining further comment.

Ainum, the country's first woman A-G, had been an effective A-G and public prosecutor, Rais said.

"The Government expresses its appreciation to Ainum, and I am sure her expertise will be required from time to time," he said.

Asked if the Government might consider making the A-G answerable to Parliament, Rais said there was not much difference as the A-G answers to the Government and in turn, the minister answers to Parliament.

Asked about the Solicitor-General's position as the incumbent Datuk Heliliah Mohd Yusof is also due for retirement, he said he did not want to speculate.

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