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AG-Gani

GANI PATAIL IS NEW ATTORNEY-GENERAL

By: Abdul Muin Majid

PUTRAJAYA, Nov 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Abdul Gani Patail, head of the prosecution division of the Attorney-General's Chambers, has been appointed Malaysia's new Attorney-General.

He succeeded Datuk Seri Ainum Mohd Saaid who has resigned for health reasons and whose resignation was accepted by the government today, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said.

"The appointment takes effect on Jan 1 but Abdul Gani will assume the duties of the Attorney-General once Ainum goes on leave soon," he told a news conference at his office here.

"The Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) has agreed to Datuk Gani Patail taking over the duties of Attorney-General from Ainum," Dr Rais said.

He said because of Ainum's health problems, the government today agreed to accept her resignation.

Ainum made history when she became the first woman to be appointed the country's Attorney-General on Jan 1 this year.

In September, she went on medical leave for a long-standing thyroid problem.

Ainum told reporters last week that her health was still not good but she was trying to manage the situation and would have to see if it deteriorated.

Dr Rais said today Ainum had submitted her letter of resignation to the government, citing health reasons that prevented her from continuing her heavy responsibilities as A-G.

The A-G is the country's Public Prosecutor who also has the sole discretion whether to prosecute someone and what charge to prefer.

The minister said Ainum first indicated her intention of resigning a few months ago.

Gani, 46, who hails from Sabah, is a law graduate of the University of Malaya.

He has been head of prosecution since 1994 and has also served as head of the Advisory and International Division and Law Revision Commissioner.

When contacted by Bernama, Gani declined comments on his appointment, saying he would only do so tomorrow.

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Dr Rais expressed confidence that Gani would be able to discharge his duties as the new A-G effectively and efficiently, and that he would always uphold the rule of law.

He said the government would also like to express its gratitude to Ainum for her "sterling services" as A-G for the past year and believed that her vast experience in the legal field would be needed from time to time.

The minister said Dr Mahathir had agreed to the arrangement surrounding the succession and that the government would continue with the current format of legal service and administration.

On whether Gani had been informed of the appointment, Dr Rais said this was a routine administrative matter which would be followed up by the Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Samsudin Osman.

"I have met him (Gani) and Datuk Seri Ainum also met me this morning to deliver the envelope containing the resignation letter. The letter was handed over to the KSN (Samsudin) today itself," he said.

He said Ainum would need a few days to clear up a few things before going on leave.

"I did request that she facilitates a handing-over note to Datuk Gani so that the rest of the staff, at least the top-notch staff at the A-G Chambers, would be in the position to carry out business as usual and take part in all the matters which are before the courts and those administrative and legal requirements that are awaiting," he said.

Asked about Ainum's thyroid condition, Dr Rais said that was the known problem but he would not go into the details about her health as it was a sensitive and personal matter.

"That is the general nature of her illness and she has been suffering from it for some months now. I would say for the last three or four months, her illness has been rather noticeable and I am sure it has been hard on her," he said.

Asked whether Ainum was "pressured" to resign, Dr Rais said: "I am not succumbing to such speculations. But I am telling you now the speculations are baseless. I interact with her every week. So I think I am qualified to say that I know of the circumstances more."

He also said that as the new A-G, Gani would do the necessary "realignment" of the department.

"He will suggest to the government the various changes to be carried out, if need be. For the rest of the top notches there, I think time will tell where and when they will go, if they go, to the levels that have been slotted for them," he said.

On the position of Solicitor-General Datuk Heliliah Mohamed Yusof, the second most senior person in the A-G Chambers, he said: "She's not retiring yet, so let's not go into that. She's still there and Datuk Heliliah is doing the job. We will not speculate."

Asked about a suggestion by the DAP that appointing a minister as A-G would mean more accountability to Parliament, Dr Rais said it would not make much difference.

"Because the A-G is firstly the legal adviser to the government, and he or she is also the chief prosecutor of the land. Whatever he or she does,

the government has to be informed and the minister concerned could always speak up in Parliament," he added.

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MAM AU RYN