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Hamid's move a prelude to Cabinet reshuffle

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CHANGES in the Cabinet line-up is now imminent, with talks sweeping through the ruling parties that it may involve the resignation of several key ministers, inclusion of a few old and new faces, and appointments of more women candidates to ministerial posts.

Last Friday's announcement by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Senator Datuk Paduka Abdul Hamid Othman that he had tendered his resignation signalled the possible changes in the Cabinet line-up soon.

Prior to this, news reports speculated that Abdul Hamid, who lost the Sik parliamentary seat to Pas candidate Datuk Shahnnon Ahmad in the 1999 general election, may take up a new post as Islamic affairs adviser to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

According to the reports, Dr Mahathir is also expected to announce the changes in the Cabinet line-up after his week-long trip to Myanmar which began last Wednesday.

News that the Prime Minister was planning a Cabinet reshuffle were circulating since mid-December last year but since then, Dr Mahathir has denied any reshuffle. However, he did not dismiss the possibility that there may be new additions to the existing line-up.

Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin, who was also said to be among the casualties in the new Cabinet line-up, will retain his portfolio but the Special Functions Ministry of which he is also Minister may be abolished, sources say.

Deputy Education Minister and former political secretary to Dr Mahathir, Senator Datuk Abdul Aziz Samsuddin is rumoured for a promotion to a Cabinet minister. This will be a promotion for Abdul Aziz who was appointed to the present position after the last general election. He was made senator in November 1999.

Former Selangor Menteri Besar and Umno vice-president, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, along with Umno executive secretary and Federal Territory Umno liaison head Senator Datuk Tengku Adnan Mansor are also tipped to be given Cabinet posts.

Muhammad, who resigned as Selangor Menteri Besar in April 1997, was re-elected as Umno vice-president in the party elections last year, while corporate figure cum politician Tengku Adnan was appointed Umno executive secretary in mid-1999 before being appointed senator in December last year.

Both of them may be appointed ministers in the Prime Minister's Department but sources say one of them may head the revived Ministry of Federal Territory, once held by Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad in the 80s.

Meanwhile, Parliamentary Secretary in the Prime Minister's Department and Tanjung Karang Member of Parliament (MP) Datuk Noh Omar may be slotted for a promotion to a Deputy Minister.

Noh, 43, is a lawyer by training and a two-term MP, and is currently alumni chairman of the Overseas Umno Club.

Two Wanita Umno state chiefs are rumoured to be included in the reshuffle list for a post of parliamentary secretary.

They are Arau MP and Perlis Wanita chief Mastika Junaidah Hussein and Sepang MP and Selangor Wanita chief, Datin Paduka Seripah Noli Syed Hussein. It is speculated that one of them will be appointed to the Ministry of Information.

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