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Old hands likely in Sabah Cabinet

KOTA KINABALU, Mon. - Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah president Tan Sri Joseph Kurup and former Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh met with in-coming Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat today amid speculation that they would be included in the new Cabinet.

Other leaders who met Chong at his office at the Ministry of Tourism Development, Environment, Science and Technology here were Sabah Umno treasurer Datuk Musa Aman and United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun-Murut Organisation secretary-general Datuk Wences Anggang.

Kurup, who is a nominated Assemblyman, was Deputy Chief Minister until the dissolution of the State Assembly in March 1999. Although the Barisan Nasional won the election, Kurup was not reappointed because he lost his Bingkor seat.

Nominated in the middle of last year, Kurup is expected to be given a key Ministerial post considering his seniority and vast experience.

Ghapur, who is Kalabakan Assemblyman, was Deputy Chief Minister between 1995 and 1998. He left the cabinet when Upko president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok was appointed Chief Minister in May 1998.

Ghapur is expected to be made Minister in the Chief Minister's Department, taking over from Musa, who is expected to be made Finance Minister.

Another potential candidate for the Finance portfolio is Sabah Umno deputy liaison chief and former Chief Minister Datuk Salleh Tun Said.

Should Salleh, who is Usukan Assemblyman and Kota Belud MP, be included in the Cabinet, he is likely to be made Deputy Chief Minister representing the Muslim Bumiputera. The post is currently held by Datuk Lajim Ukin.

Wences, who had a brief meeting with Chong, is likely to remain as Human Resource and Information Technology Minister.

There is also speculation that Sabah Progressive Party president Datuk Yong Teck Lee would be included in Chong's Cabinet.

Under the present Cabinet, the Sabah Progressive Party has two full Ministers in Datuk Tham Nyip Shen (Deputy Chief Minister/Minister of Industrial Development, and Datuk Raymond Tan (Minister of Consumer Affairs and Community Development).

Should Yong decide to join the Cabinet, either Tham or Tan will have to make way for him. Yong is likely to be made a Deputy Chief Minister representing the Chinese community.

There are three Deputy Chief Ministers in the State Cabinet representing the Muslim Bumiputera, Chinese and the non-Muslim Bumiputera.

Datuk Wilfred Bumburing, who is Deputy Chief Minister representing the non-Muslim Bumiputera, is likely to remain in the Cabinet.

But sources said the post of Deputy Chief Minister would be a toss up between Bumburing, who is currently Minister of Infrastructure Development, and Kurup.

There is also speculation that Chong might decide to have only one Deputy Chief Minister.

Chong, who currently holds the Tourism Development, Environment, Science and Technology portfolio, is likely to continue to hold the post besides being the Chief Minister.

It is learnt that Chong, who is credited for Sabah's rapid tourism development, would like to see continuity to ensure that the foundation laid for the promotion of tourism produces the desired result.

Lajim, who is presently Agriculture Development and Food Industry Minister, Datuk Yahya Hussein (Local Government and Housing) and Datuk Rubin Balang (Sports Development and Culture and Youth) are likely to be retained.

Chong had on Saturday said that there will be "interesting and significant" changes in the Cabinet under him.

He said what was more important is the positioning of members of the Cabinet.

Chong is expected to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad this week to discuss his Cabinet line-up.

The Chief Minister and members of the Cabinet are expected to be sworn in on March 26.

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