

10/01/2001

## PM confirms impending Cabinet reshuffle

Ramlan Said

PETALING JAYA, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today confirmed that a Cabinet reshuffle was imminent and that he needed time to deliberate on the matter.

The Prime Minister said further deliberation was necessary as a Cabinet reshuffle was a serious matter involving the Government.

"God willing, hopefully it will be soon," he told reporters at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang when asked when the announcement would be made.

The Prime Minister was speaking at a Press conference upon his return from a five-day official visit to Myanmar.

On whether an announcement could be expected after the Cabinet meeting tomorrow, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know yet ... tomorrow I have to attend a Cabinet meeting, perhaps it has some views (on the reshuffle)."

The Prime Minister explained he had to think carefully before making any changes to the Cabinet.

"Give me some time to think. This is not something that can be carried out hastily ... I have to look at it carefully."

Speculation of a Cabinet reshuffle has been rife since the appointment of Umno executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansur as a Senator last month.

The resignation of Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Abdul Hamid Othman last week further fuelled speculation on the matter.

The Prime Minister, who was in a jovial mood, said Abdul Hamid's resignation meant someone had to be appointed to fill the vacancy.

To questions on whether many Ministers would be dropped and the possibility of a new woman Minister being appointed, Dr Mahathir replied: "I don't know yet."

On whether it would be a major reshuffle, he said it depended on how one viewed it.

"If compared to a major reshuffle, then it will be minor. But when compared against a minor reshuffle, it will appear major."

Dr Mahathir was also asked to confirm whether the reshuffle would see Umno Ministers holding important party posts being dropped to enable them to concentrate on party matters.

"I don't know yet ... I have to think carefully about this."

When pointed out that the resignation of Abdul Hamid to concentrate on efforts uniting the Muslims and the party indicated that a move to separate the party and Government was being planned, Dr Mahathir said: "It is true that Abdul Hamid has resigned but I think he can still contribute to the Government through other positions."

Dr Mahathir last reshuffled his Cabinet in 1999 which saw the departure of two senior Umno Ministers. They were Information Minister Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat and Culture, Art and Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Sabbaruddin Chik.

On whether Pas' request for the scope of the Malay unity talks to be expanded to national unity, he said no conditions should be imposed.

"We want to discuss Malay unity, there should not be any conditions."

Asked to comment on the cancellation of the debate on Malay unity between Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and his counterpart from Pas, Mahfuz Omar, the Prime Minister said it was no longer necessary

as both parties would be meeting to discuss the same subject.

"Since Umno and Pas will talk on Malay unity, I think it would be better to allow it to take place. The debate may only give rise to things which could hinder efforts towards uniting the Malays."

On his visit to Myanmar, he described it as a success with the country holding great investment opportunities like in fisheries, agriculture and industries based on natural resources.

The Prime Minister said Myanmar wanted Malaysia to consider the possibility of investing in such areas, adding that the country offered many business and trade opportunities for Malaysian companies.

Besides the availability of various agriculture products like onions, sugar and maize for import, various ventures could be set that could help fulfill Malaysia's needs.

"It is a country rich in natural and raw resources. It has vast agriculture land."

Dr Mahathir said his visit enabled him to have a first-hand look of the country, adding he found the negative situation often portrayed in reports to be untrue.

"I find that the Myanmar Government gives emphasis to development, including those involving its people in rural areas."

Among those present to welcome him at the airport were Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaacob and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

(END)