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Dr M likely to announce minor Cabinet reshuffle today

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to announce a minor Cabinet reshuffle tomorrow, with new appointments largely involving MCA leaders.

It is learnt that an Umno leader is also likely to be named in the new line-up.

The reshuffle follows the resignation of Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who handed his letter to Dr Mahathir on May 28, five days after he stepped down as MCA president.

Since his resignation, new MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, who is also the Housing and Local Government Minister, has been the acting Transport Minister.

Ong was elected MCA president on May 23.

Deputy MCA president Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek also tendered his resignation along with Dr Ling, paving the way for Ong and Datuk Chan Kong Choy to be elected into the two top positions.

Following the elevation of Chan, there has been speculation that he will be made a full minister while his deputy finance minister's post is expected to be filled by International Trade and Industry Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Fu Ah Kiow.

MCA holds four ministerial posts - Ong, Datuk Fong Chan Onn (Human Resources) and Datuk Chua Jui Meng (Health) and the transport ministry, which is vacant.

They also have six deputy ministers and three parliamentary secretaries.

The deputy ministers are Datuk Tan Chai Ho (Energy, Communications and Multimedia), Datuk Chor Chee Heung (Home), Chan (Finance), Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen (Culture, Arts and Tourism), Datuk Hon Choon Kim (Education) and Datuk Ong Tee Keat (Youth and Sports).

Fu, Wong Kam Hoong (Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs) and Datuk Donald Lim Siang Chai (Transport) are the parliamentary secretaries.

Ipoh Barat Member of Parliament C.S. Ho is expected to be made parliamentary secretary.

Dr Ling's departure was part of the Prime Minister-brokered peace plan to end the three-year crisis in MCA.

In 1999, the exclusion of Chan as a full minister led to a split in the party, and later events like the Nanyang takeover aggravated the crisis.

MCA has asked for an additional deputy ministerial position, possibly in the Women and Family Development Ministry, which is headed by Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

At present, there is no deputy minister and parliamentary secretary for the ministry, which was set up in January 2001.

Gerakan and MIC sources said they had not approached Dr Mahathir for additional ministerial, deputy or parliamentary secretary posts. Also likely to join the Government as a senator is Puteri Umno chief Azalina Othman Said.

The last Cabinet reshuffle announced by the Prime Minister was in November when Rompin MP Datuk Dr Jamaludin Jarjis was appointed Second Finance Minister, and Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor promoted to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

Information Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Zainuddin Maidin was elevated to deputy minister in the same ministry.

Dr Mahathir had on May 29 indicated that there would be a Cabinet reshuffle this month.