

CABINET RESHUFFLE?

Changes may be announced this week

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ABDULLAH: To announce changes

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. — Call a halt to the speculation.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is likely to announce changes to the Cabinet soon, possibly as early as this week.

For some ministers, it will be curtains after more than three decades of public service, and for a few others it will mean being promoted to more senior portfolios.

But expect to see familiar names like MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and Gerakan chief Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and a Cabinet quite similar in size to the one after the general election in 2004.

This is perhaps a reflection of the Barisan Nasional system, where several factors are taken into account when appointing members to the Cabinet, including geographical considerations.

The *New Straits Times* understands that Abdullah's main consideration will be on getting a team to help implement key programmes under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

The Prime Minister views that plan as a critical feature of driving the country towards developed-nation status.

Veteran ministers offer to make way

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As such, he has mulled his choice of ministers to lead key areas such as Finance, International Trade and Industry, Education, Information and Communications Technology, Agriculture, Regional and Public Enterprise.

The NST understands that several veteran ministers have gone to see Abdullah and offered to make

way.

The vacuum in the Federal Territories Ministry left by the sacking of Tan Sri Isa Samad needs to be filled.

Also, with Sarawak state elections looming, there is a strong possibility that Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Adenan Satem may want to play a bigger role in State politics.

Information Minister Datuk

Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, who has expressed his desire to retire, is expected to announce his resignation from the Cabinet in the next few days.

There is not likely to be any change in the MCA line-up of ministers, with Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy, Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek and Datuk Seri Dr Fong Chan Onn all keeping their places.

But expect changes at deputy ministerial level, where appointments are likely to take into consideration the results of the MCA party elections in June.

The main change for Gerakan will be with Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Kerk Choo Ting, who lost his deputy president's post at last year's party polls.