

JOHOR MB TO STEP DOWN THIS WEEK?

Talk is rife that Osman Sopian will quit after meeting Dr M in Putrajaya

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JOHOR is buzzing with talk of Datuk Osman Sopian stepping down as menteri besar, and that a

reshuffle in the state cabinet will take place.

The speculation is that the Kempas assemblyman will announce his resignation this week after his meeting with Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu)

chairman.

The meeting is scheduled to take place at Dr Mahathir's office at Perdana Putra in Putrajaya.

Osman, 67, is also overseeing the state's natural resources, administration, finance, planning and economic development portfolios.

A source close to the state government and Johor Bersatu told the *New Straits Times* that while talk of Osman relinquishing his post had been going on for some time, it was in full throttle now. "His resignation will undoubtedly strengthen the state government and the Johor Civil Service (JCS) and Bersatu in the state.

"It is the right thing to do and he has conceded to it," the source said.

It is learnt that there were several events that had forced the latest development concerning the MB's post.

However, suggestions that Osman were being forced to resign as the Johor Palace was not satisfied with his performance, were dismissed by the source.

"Such a scenario is unlikely as Osman has a good relationship with the palace... even from before he was appointed as menteri besar."

The source, however, said



Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Osman Sopian is overseeing the state's natural resources, administration, finance, planning and economic development portfolios. FILE PIC

there was much unhappiness among Pakatan Harapan leaders about how Osman had managed the state.

"There were occasions where he made announcements about decisions without discussing them in the state executive councillors' meeting.

"The party is concerned about how he has been handling land transactions in the state," the source said.

Osman had courted controversy after he visited the Malaysian Marine Department (MMD) vessel, MV *Pedoman*, leading to criticism from Singapore that the boat had strayed into the city state's waters.

Bersatu's top leadership, the sources said, was not impressed with the way Osman handled the controversy surrounding his academic qualifications.

Some quarters in the party were unhappy that it took a long time for him to clear the air over the issue.

It was reported in February that Osman's education credentials had come under scrutiny after checks showed that he did not obtain his degree from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).

The Johor government's portal stated that Osman had obtained a certificate in account-

ing from Metro Manila College in the Philippines in 1985 apart from a diploma and degree in accounting from UPM.

A few days after the report surfaced, he admitted that he did not complete his studies in Kolej Pertanian Malaya, which was later upgraded to UPM.

Since then, his education credentials had been removed from the portal.

"Johor is a progressive state with a lot of trading and economic activities.

"We need a strong and capable leader with credibility to lead the state.

"A driven leader is important to lead the JCS, which is the foundation of the state government.

"Hence, the change (in the menteri besar) is imperative for Johor to achieve greater things, as well as to strengthen the 26 Bersatu divisions in the state."

A smooth transition after Osman relinquishes his post is expected provided that his successor is also from Bersatu.

There is talk that PKR is also eyeing the post, but this has been described as a "bad idea" since the bulk of support from PH came from Bersatu supporters in the state.