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## Harper to seek fresh look with cabinet shuffle

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By Randall Palmer

OTTAWA (Reuters) - Prime Minister Stephen Harper will announce a cabinet shuffle on Tuesday afternoon, a move aides said is intended to breathe new life into his minority government after 1-1/2 years in power.

His broad policy direction -- bolstering the Canadian military, cracking down on crime, cutting taxes -- is unlikely to change but he is planning to give his ministries a new look, they said. Details of the shuffle are scheduled to be made public at 3:45 p.m.

Most observers expect embattled Defense Minister Gordon O'Connor, who earlier this year provided inaccurate information connected with Canada's mission to Afghanistan, to be moved to a new portfolio.

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There was no sign that Harper will move Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, a professed tax cutter who violated a campaign promise by introducing a tax on income trusts last year.

Flaherty steered two budgets through the minority Parliament, ramping up spending sharply while also lowering the federal sales tax, but clashed with the premiers of the Atlantic provinces over federal transfers.

Media reports said Foreign Minister Peter MacKay would be moved, possibly to the industry portfolio, where he would be responsible for grants that could be useful in shoring up sagging Conservative support in his native Atlantic region.

Harper was elected in January 2006, ending more than 12 years of Liberal rule. He has managed to exceed the average 18-month life span of a Canadian minority government and stay sufficiently ahead of the opposition in the polls that they do not dare bring him down.

But he has also been unable to boost his standing with the public to the levels that would enable him to win a majority of seats in Parliament and therefore not have to rely on opposition parties to get his legislation through.

A new poll issued on Tuesday by SES Research put the Conservatives at 36 percent, up four points from May, and the Liberals at 33 percent, unchanged from May. It carries a margin of error of 3.3 points 19 times out of 20.

Harper has promised an election in October 2009 but has to be ready to fight one any time enough opposition members team up to defeat him.

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