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**PETALING JAYA:** KPJ Healthcare Bhd will appoint its current chief operating officer Amiruddin Abdul Satar as its new chief executive officer effective early next year, replacing the long-serving Datin Paduka Siti Sa'adiah Sheikh Bakir, sources said.

Meanwhile, banking sources also speculated that KPJ is aggressively looking at more mergers and acquisitions (M&As) following its recent buy of a stake in a Thai hospital.

"KPJ has aspirations to have a regional footprint and they are pursuing that actively," said one investment banker.

Bankers confirmed that talks have begun towards this end although they declined to provide names of some of the potential M&A targets, hinting only that if any deal were to materialise there would be a "strong" regional aspect to the deal.

KPJ recently forked out RM60.5mil to buy a 23.4% stake in Thailand's Vejthani Public Co Ltd (VPCL), which operates the Vejthani Hospital, a multi-specialty private hospital in Bangkok. This deal was likely to be a prelude to a larger exercise, bankers said.

# KPJ in the spotlight

## Group to name new CEO, aggressively looking at more M&As

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Meanwhile, the new CEO-in-waiting, Amiruddin, has been with KPJ since 1993 and was made an executive director last July.

The 47-year-old is an accountant by profession and according to his profile on the KPJ website, he holds an MBA from the University of Reading in the United Kingdom. He is said to have played an important role in KPJ's operations as well having been involved in strategy and investment-related decisions of the group.

Amiruddin also sits on the boards of several KPJ hospitals including the chairmanship of KPJ Ipoh Specialist Hospital. He has also been board member of the Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia (APHM) since 1996.

Siti Sa'adiah, meanwhile, has been at the helm of KPJ for the last 20

> TURN TO PAGE 2



A file picture shows one of the hospitals under the KPJ group. KPS is expected to appoint Amiruddin Abdul Satar (inset) as its CEO effective early next year.

## KPJ's Islamic REIT is world's first

> FROM PAGE 1

years. It had already been speculated months ago that she will be replaced by 2013. Under her stewardship, KPJ has grown to become the country's largest private healthcare group, operating 21 hospitals locally with two hospitals in Indonesia and a retirement and age-care resort in Australia.

During her tenure at KPJ, the group set up the world's first Islamic real estate investment trust (REIT), Al-Aqar Healthcare REIT, in which Siti Sa'adiah sits as a non-independent non-executive director.

In a recent report on KPJ, JP Morgan analysts commended the group's asset light model by injecting its hospital assets into the Aqar Reit and even speculated that a special cash dividend could be in the offing.

JP Morgan stated that by injecting its hospital assets into Aqar Reit, KPJ minimises its asset base to fuel its expansion, therefore keeping net gearing at a minimum and maximising returns on equity.

Earlier this year, KPJ said it would spend RM2bil over the next five years to build new and expand existing hospitals locally and abroad.

Siti Sa'adiah has also reportedly said that despite its rapid expansion, KPJ did not need to raise any cash, as it has commercial papers and medium-term notes of RM250mil which could be utilised if necessary.