

# A Cabinet of pragmatic people: Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — The assigning of portfolios to the members of the new Cabinet was made after careful consideration based on pragmatic reasoning, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister added that neither paper nor professional qualifications were major considerations.

"We are pragmatic people," he told a Press conference after announcing his new Cabinet at his office.

"We do not select the members purely for intellectual reasons. We evaluate each according to political needs and the needs of the nation.

"There is no one reason for the selection of each individual."

The Prime Minister also said there was no fixed formula in selecting the members of the Barisan Nasional component parties.

Dr Mahathir said no radical changes were made to the Cabinet as

"we are conservative".

"We do not believe that radical changes can solve our problems."

Dr Mahathir said he had applied the same principle used previously as there were no changes made to the emphasis or composition of the Barisan Nasional component parties.

He said he had moved certain Ministers in a mutual exchange of portfolios to give them the opportunity to head other Ministries.

## Discussing

"It is not necessary for someone to hold a particular post for the rest of his life or as long as he is a politician. We have to give others a chance."

Asked why Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba was given the Housing and Local Government portfolio in addition to being the National and Rural Development Minister, Dr Mahathir quipped: "Perhaps its because Encik Ghafar has the capacity to hold many posts..."

He said the Housing and Local Government portfolio, previously held by an MCA Minister, had now come under the purview of Encik Ghafar because "we are holding it for some time".

The Prime Minister declined to state if this position was being "held" by his deputy pending the outcome of the trial involving MCA president Tan Koon Swan, which opens in Singapore tomorrow.

Dr Mahathir also said he expected the Cabinet to get down to business as soon as possible.

"In fact, I expect them to get going immediately."

He added that in finalising the Cabinet line-up, he had consulted leaders of the Barisan Nasional component parties "although the prerogative (to appoint) is mine".

"But as usual, I do not take action without discussing with the other leaders and the Deputy Prime Minister."

He also said an Usno

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representative would be appointed to the Cabinet at a later date.

However, this did not mean that the Usno candidate would fill the vacant Justice portfolio previously held by Datuk James Ongkili, who has retired from politics.

The Prime Minister also dismissed suggestions of a Cabinet reshuffle after the Umno General Assembly next year, saying he did not see any reason for one.

Dr Mahathir said there would be no major policy changes.

## Promise

"My immediate priority is to govern the nation. We think we are on the right track. That's why we have been elected. Some people think that because some members of the opposition have been elected, we have therefore to follow what the opposition wants us to do. We follow what our supporters want us to do."

The new Government would fulfil its promise of championing the people's rights.

"We will serve the people... We will defend their rights against those who only defend the rights of a single community.

Dr Mahathir also said his main priority was to tackle economic problems such as unemployment and investment.

On whether he would trim the civil service, he said: "We don't sack people. We are not taking more... The only way is to privatise... The Government's freeze on new jobs is still on to a certain extent."