

# Dr M on the appointment of Ministers Loyalty to the country first

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**KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he is now free to decide on the composition of his Cabinet.**

Without revealing the date of the reshuffle, Dr Mahathir, who was returned to another term as party president, said he would not ask his Cabinet to resign *en bloc* to allow him a free hand in selecting a new line-up.

Speaking to reporters after the closing of the 38th Umno general assembly, he declined to say if he would drop those who opposed him in the party elections.

In the elections, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who teamed up with Datuk Musa Hitam, failed in his bid for the party presidency.

Foreign Minister Datuk Rais Yatim, who was in the Razaleigh-Musa camp, also failed to capture one of the three vice-presidents' post.

However, two Ministers identified with the

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Photographers: YAHYA YACOB, KHALID REDZA and ANNUAR HASHIM.**

team, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Ajib Ahmad and Welfare Minister Datuk Shahrir Samad, were elected as supreme councillors.

Dr Mahathir said loyalty to the country was the sole criterion for appointments to the Government. Supreme council members need not necessarily be automatically appointed to the Cabinet.

Asked if a new Cabinet would be represented by leaders from among those who supported and opposed him, the Prime Minister said: "Wait and see."

However, he agreed that in foreign countries, Ministers who disagreed and challenged the head of the Government would normally resign.

"If they do not, what can we do?" he asked.

Asked whether he would remove Tengku Razaleigh from the Cabinet for challenging him for the presidency, Dr Mahathir said it was an hypothetical question.

He said Ministers do not have to be loyal to him personally to be in his Cabinet.

Earlier, when replying to points raised during the two days of debate at the general assembly, Dr Mahathir said he had never made loyalty a criterion or condition for appointing Cabinet members.

He said members were never required to pledge loyalty to the Prime Minister when taking their oaths of office.

They only had to firstly pledge not to divulge Government secrets and, secondly, to carry out

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their responsibility honestly and to the best of their ability as well as be loyal to Malaysia and to protect and defend the Constitution.

He then went on to read the contents of the two oaths Cabinet Ministers take when they are sworn to office.

Dr Mahathir said since he took over as Prime Minister he had never appointed Cabinet members based on their loyalty to him.

"If I had chosen those who were loyal to me, then there would not have been any contest for the presidency this time.

"I am not willing to appoint those who are loyal to me but cannot work."

However, Cabinet members must also be able to co-operate with one another and accept collective responsibility.

He said he had to clarify this point so that there would be no confusion if and when a Cabinet reshuffle took place.

When talking to the Press Dr Mahathir, who was returned to the presidency with a 43-vote majority, said the mandate given by the party would help him to strengthen the party and the administration.

On the close contest, he said the results did not reflect the thinking of the entire membership.

He quoted the difference in the number of nominations that he and Tengku Razaleigh obtained.

Dr Mahathir received nominations from 88 divisions and Tengku Razaleigh from 37.

Asked whether Umno would have direct presidential elections involving all its 1.6 million members, he said such possibility had not been considered as yet.

"If that's what members want, we can consider it.

"However, this is a massive affair. We don't have to take it simply because a few people suggest it."

The Prime Minister said there should not be too many elections because it would affect the party's struggle for the people and country.

He said contests for the top posts should only be held to fill vacancies.

He added that this was true when he supported Datuk Musa for deputy president in 1984.

He felt that the party had become more experienced from this election.

To a question, Dr Mahathir said there were no camps in the party, except that there were two groups during the election.

Referring to accusations that money politics were involved during the campaign, he said he and his colleagues were not involved.

On whether the contests had affected the country's relationship with others, Dr Mahathir said this should not happen because they were aware that this was an election process.

He said the secrets revealed during the campaign could not be used by the opposition parties in the next General Election because what was disclosed only clarified who had made or agreed to certain decisions.