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Various criteria used in selection of team, says Prime Minister

PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - Various criteria were used in the selection of the new Cabinet line-up, Deputy Ministers and Parliamentary secretaries, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said today.

The performance of ministers in the previous Cabinet as well as the achievements of the component parties of the Barisan Nasional in the Nov 29 general election were also assessed, he said.

The new Cabinet, he announced, was aimed at maintaining the delicate balance among the component parties, the States, experience and youth.

Explaining the difficulties he faced in the selection process, Dr Mahathir said there were many criteria involved. "That's why it was a little late," said Dr Mahathir when speaking to reporters after naming the new line-up at his office in Putrajaya.

Dr Mahathir also said that the new Budget for the year 2000 would be presented on Dec 20.

"The Parliament will meet on the 20th and the budget will be tabled," said Dr Mahathir, adding that there would be no changes made.

"It's the same budget.

"There's no change but it is necessary that we get it passed by Parliament; otherwise we can't spend money next year," he said.

First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin had presented the Budget at the Dewan Rakyat on Oct 29 but it was not passed as Parliament was dissolved about two weeks later.

Dr Mahathir explained why certain figures, widely expected to be named into the Cabinet, did not make it this time around.

Asked to comment on the exclusion of Kelantan Umno liaison chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Dr Mahathir said:

"We have taken into consideration various criteria in the appointment of Ministers, and if a person does not fit in the criteria, of course we cannot appoint him, no matter who he is."

Dr Mahathir was also asked why the new line-up only has two women members (Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman) compared to the previous Cabinet's three.

He said it was not easy to find the candidates who would fit in with the many pre-requisites in terms of party and State quotas.

"I regret very much that I cannot have three.

"I had wanted to have three or more but it's not possible.

"We'll make up in some other way," said Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister was also asked whether this was going to be his last term in office.

He said: "Most likely ... in the next term I'll be very near 80 years old.

"I'll be having astigmatism and all that ... cannot see so this will be the last term.

"Although there have been people who are telling me that I should continue forever, but continuing forever is a little difficult."

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's move from Education back to the Defence portfolio was due to his narrow 241-vote victory in the Pekan parliamentary constituency in the general election.

The Prime Minister said it was not.

"It is because we want to have a new minister drawn from outside," he

said.

He said that Najib's replacement in the Education Ministry, Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, was chosen to inject new ideas into the Cabinet and the Ministry.

Dr Mahathir said the decision to select an outsider was a necessary move.

"This is because we find that many of our intellectuals who are outside Umno, for example, cannot join Umno effectively because there are processes of promotions in the branches and divisions that will take too long, whereas they have certain abilities which the Government needs," said Dr Mahathir.

The new members of the line-up will have to submit their declarations of assets to the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir said the process would be made more systematic.

"In the past some Ministers did not declare their assets," he said.

Asked to elaborate how the process could be made more effective, Dr Mahathir said: "I have ways and means.

"I don't want to publicly announce it."