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Dr M on how they were picked

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Two Menteris Besar were excluded from the 10 new appointments to the Umno supreme council due to limited vacancies and to accommodate the various groups in the party, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We give consideration to everybody. Otherwise it (the party) becomes a very inbred kind of organisation. We don't get any external injection," Dr Mahathir told a press conference today after attending the launch of the International Seminar and Dialogue on "Enhancing the Understanding of Islam for the Media" held at the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia here.

Dr Mahathir, who is Prime Minister, was asked to comment on the appointment of the 10 supreme council members as announced in a statement by Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob.

The party president, under the Umno constitution, has the prerogative to appoint 10 members to the council. Another 25 members are elected.

On the five new appointees - Dr Norraesah Mohamad, Azalina Othman, Datuk Idris Jusoh, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Azimi Daim - who do not hold any government positions, Dr Mahathir said that the party wanted capable council members who under normal circumstances "would never be able to be elected by Umno".

Dr Mahathir, said there were many criteria used to select appointees. "Women were not chosen (during the party's May election), so we gave more seats to women.

"And we also want some people who are sympathetic towards the party but would never be able to be elected by Umno," said Dr Mahathir.

He added: "Quite a number of them are people who did not contest, or who have (not) been active in Umno. But their views are useful."

Others appointed into the council were National unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman, Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, Johor menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Osu Sukam and Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad.

On the appointment of Musa, Dr Mahathir said it was based on several factors. "He's not a (party) activist, he did not contest, but then he is holding a very important portfolio."

On Tengku Razaleigh's appointment, Dr Mahathir said it was because Razaleigh was a leader who had made contributions to the party.

Dr Mahathir was also queried on the high number of council members from Sabah.

He said it was a reflection of the State's importance to Umno.

"Sabah has a very powerful Umno. We need to have representation," he said.

Apart from the appointment of Osu, (who lost his bid for a vice-presidential position in the party's May election), three other leaders from Sabah were voted into the council.

They were Datuk Mohd Shafie Apdal, Datuk Salleh Said Keruak and Datuk Lajim Ukin.

In Ipoh, Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali who has been reappointed as the State Umno liaison chief will use his position to strengthen and unite party members.

"I am grateful with the appointment and the new Supreme Council line-up

fulfils the aspiration of party members to have old and new faces," he said when contacted here today.

On the appointment of Deputy Transport Minister Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib as his deputy, he said: "Ramli's experience as the State liaison chief and Menteri Besar for 17 years will strengthen the party especially in efforts to wrest back seats lost to the Opposition in the last general election."

Meanwhile, Umno Youth Information chief Azimi Daim was surprised about his appointment as a supreme council member after being informed by party headquarters at 4.30pm today.

In a related development, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said he would continue to give his best service to Umno despite not being appointed to the supreme council, the party's highest policy-making body.

"There'll be times when one is inside and also there'll be times when we are outside but the important thing is we give our best service (to the party)," he said.

Syed Hamid lost in the contest for the vice-presidency in last month's party elections. He was a former supreme council member.

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