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Khalil, Daim keep Umno posts (HL)

Ramlan Said; Abdul Razak Ahmad; Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob and Tun Daim Zainuddin were reappointed Umno's secretary-general and treasurer, respectively, while Datuk Mustapa Mohamed was named as the new information chief.

Announcing this today, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad also said some Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers who lost in the party elections last month may not be appointed as State liaison chiefs or supreme council members.

Daim's reappointment further dispelled mounting rumours and speculation, especially through several foreign Press reports, of a rift between him and Dr Mahathir.

On May 28, when asked to comment on the so-called rift, Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying that the rumours were not new, but differences of opinion between them were always settled by consensus.

Mustapa, who is Finance Ministry adviser, replaces Datuk Dr Yusof Noor, who however remains in the council after being voted in during the party elections three weeks ago.

Speaking at a Press conference after chairing the party's first supreme council meeting since the elections, Dr Mahathir, who is also Prime Minister, said he had yet to appoint the State liaison chiefs and the 10 members of the supreme council, the prerogative of which is his as party president.

Asked when the appointments would be made, Dr Mahathir said they would be done before the next council meeting in two weeks.

Among party leaders who failed to secure seats in the council were Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Osu Sukam and Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim. Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain did not contest.

Asked whether the delay in the appointments of State liaison chiefs meant that there was no urgent need to appoint them, he said: "We must be careful in our selection, because we only have 10 vacancies, whereas many are eligible."

Dr Mahathir said the party had to give due consideration to appointing those representing the women's wing, and from the States, Menteris Besar and Ministers.

"Many are qualified but we surely would have to leave out some of them," said Dr Mahathir, adding that those left out might be given responsibilities in the party's bureaus.

When pointed out that Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers usually led the party at the State level, Dr Mahathir said this practice might now see a change.

On whether the exclusion of Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers as State liaison chiefs would create problems in the smooth running of the States, Dr Mahathir said the matter would be studied.

He said the council also agreed to alternate the venue of its subsequent meetings between Kuala Lumpur and the States. The council meets twice a month.

"This is so that we can see the conditions in the States and get closer to them."

He said no decision had been made on which State would host the first

outstation council meeting.

Dr Mahathir said money politics in the party was also discussed and this drew several proposals from members on ways to curb the menace. These will be studied and implemented.

The meeting also agreed to lift the temporary ban on Umno State conventions which were usually held before the delegates meetings. The decision to postpone the conventions, made in the run-up to the general assembly, was to prevent them from being used as campaigning platforms by candidates.

Dr Mahathir also commented on today's meeting, pointing out that it was only attended by elected members, the secretary-general and treasurer.

"This is because we want to hear their views without their voice being drowned by those regarded as the president's appointees. It turned out that we shared the same views."

On another matter, Dr Mahathir said council members were united in their stand that Malaysia should maintain its independence and not bow down to pressure from any quarters.

"We do not want our country to be ridiculed by any foreign country.

"We should not feel ashamed with our approach in solving problems, we do not want to be influenced by the views of foreigners.

"We will maintain our actions for the good of the country without taking into consideration the views of foreigners who are not happy with our progress especially the foreign media who want to see the Government become weak."

Meanwhile, Mustapa described his appointment as very challenging as there was a need to restore the party's image.

"I need to discuss with friends in the supreme council on how this could be done and on ways to perform my duty efficiently," he said.

In his usual modest manner, Mustapa said there were many others in the supreme council who were better qualified than him to hold the post.

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