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PM assures women of places in council

FOLLOWING the election of only men to the Umno Supreme Council in Thursday's party elections, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has given an assurance that there will be places for women in the Umno Supreme Council.

"We will discuss and see how the Wanita-ship is better represented in the Supreme Council. I think they deserve it," he said at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said he does not think the men-only line-up indicates a form of protest by the delegates to the party's 54th general assembly.

"It is just that the delegates chose the candidates that they are familiar with," he added.

Asked whether former Wanita Umno chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman will be appointed to the Supreme Council, Dr Mahathir said he has not decided yet.

Siti Zaharah was defeated by Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz by 12 votes at the Wanita Umno elections on Wednesday.

Asked to comment on several instances during the Umno General Assembly where delegates booed whenever Rafidah's name was mentioned, Dr Mahathir said:

"I would say this is rather unfortunate. There has been a change in leadership, and those who lost should be able to accept the change as much as the last time when there was a change in leadership, the losing side did not boo the new person elected. So, I wish that people would not boo because it is not a characteristic of an Umno General Assembly to boo people."

Asked if the delegates might have been provoked into making such a response, he said: "They seem to be doing these things together. Maybe there are some views, frank views, I don't know."

Rafidah is known for speaking her mind, and had commented that the reason why she was booed could be because she suggested that candidates sign a declaration not to campaign.

On the three elected Umno vice presidents - Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin - and whether they met his criteria for clean and hardworking leaders, Dr Mahathir said:

"So far there have been no complaints or accusations against them, so they are eligible to be elected."

Asked if he thought the delegates had followed his advice to reject corrupt leaders, the Prime Minister said he has no specific charges against these leaders.

"I have no proven evidence that they have been involved in corruption. Of course there are lots of people who make assumptions, but I cannot work on people's assumptions. I must have proof of wrongdoing. I can't condemn people without proof," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said the Umno Supreme Council line-up is a very good mix representing various groups and views.

When asked what he thought about the fact that the three vice-presidents elected were all nominated by his Kubang Pasu division, Dr Mahathir said he only realised it later when somebody pointed it out to him.

"I don't think it is because my division nominated them that the others followed suit. It is just a coincidence," he added.

Bernama reports: Wife of the Prime Minister Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah

Mohamed Ali yesterday launched a Malaysian Journalist Fund in aid of local journalists and their families.

She simultaneously launched a humanitarian fund for Iraq to buy food and medical supplies for Iraqis affected by protracted United Nations economic sanctions.

Both funds were initiated by the Association of Malay Journalists to mark Malaysian Journalist Day 2000 celebrated yesterday at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

"The initiative by the association to also launch the Iraqi humanitarian fund is commendable as I found out from my recent visit there that the Iraqis urgently need our aid," she said.

Association president Yazid Othman said May 12 was picked to observe Malaysian journalist day because on that day in 1952, local journalists first met to map out strategies to gain Malaya's independence from the British.

"I suggest that the management of the local print and electronic media declares May 12 a holiday for their staff," he added.

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