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PM: Dr Khir chosen for his experience, unblemished background

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in Mozambique

SUNGAI Panjang Assemblyman Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo was chosen as the new Menteri Besar of Selangor because of his experience, qualifications and "unblemished background".

Another reason he was chosen by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is because the government needs new blood to bring new thinking to the State.

"He is a university graduate and does not have a bad background," he said.

Asked to explain why he picked a young Umno leader as the new Selangor Menteri Besar, Dr Mahathir said: "It is a kind of renewal."

"We shouldn't be giving it (the post of Menteri Besar) only to older leaders because that will cause frustration among the younger people," he told Malaysian reporters at the Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID 2000) on Monday.

Dr Khir, 35, was appointed the Selangor Menteri Besar to replace Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar who resigned recently.

His appointment surprised certain quarters in Umno circles because of his young age.

However, Dr Mahathir said no one should be surprised by Dr Khir's appointment as he had appointed young leaders as Chief Ministers or Menteris Besar previously.

"I have chosen young men before but nobody said anything... when I appointed (Tan Sri) Rahim (Thamby Chik), (Tan Sri) Ramli (Ngah Talib) and (Tan Sri) Isa (Samad), they were all very young at the time they became the Chief Minister or the Menteri Besar.

Dr Mahathir said the appointment of Dr Khir was also to show that "this (the post) is not a prize for certain people who have been working very hard to position themselves".

"We want to show, just like I brought (Tan Sri) Musa (Mohamad) in, who is not even a member of Umno, that this is not a prize for certain people who have been working very hard to position themselves.

"Other people must also have a chance in Umno...so sometimes we give a chance to others," he explained.

Asked whether his decision would disappoint certain older leaders in Selangor Umno, Dr Mahathir said they had to accept the decision.

"They gave an undertaking to me that they would accept any decision that I made...and that's my decision," he said.

On whether there was any protest over Dr Khir's appointment, the Prime Minister said: "There's no protest."

"They said whoever I chose, they would accept and support...and after I made my decision, they said they accepted it and would give their support."

However, Dr Mahathir had no plans to make Dr Khir a member of the Umno supreme council.

"He will not be appointed to the supreme council... many Menteris Besar are not in the Supreme Council," he added.

On the release of the last three Malaysian hostages by the Abu Sayyaf group, the Prime Minister said he hoped other hostages would be released too.

"We do not want others to think that we are only concerned about the safety of our own people.

"We will continue with efforts to effect release of all the hostages," he added.

Asked on reports that Malaysia had paid a ransom for the release of Malaysian hostages, Dr Mahathir said: "We do not know... I wouldn't know if other people paid the ransom."

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