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`Rafidah move not an act of revenge'

Manan Osman; Mimi Syed Yusof

IPOH, Tues. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the move by newly-elected Wanita head Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz to replace several State Wanita leaders was not an act of revenge.

"I think people should examine carefully before jumping to conclusions. That is why yesterday I refused to comment until I have met Rafidah," he told a Press conference after launching the Teachers' Day celebrations.

Dr Mahathir was replying to claims by certain quarters that Rafidah's removal of several State Wanita heads believed to be aligned to former chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman was a way of getting even.

The line-up of the movement's State chiefs saw nine incumbents being dropped, including Siti Zaharah, who was replaced by Maznah Mazlan as the Pahang Wanita head.

Others dropped were State chiefs for Kedah (Fatimah Ismail), Selangor (Datin Paduka Rakibah Manaf), Federal Territory (Azizah Samad), Malacca (Mahani Manaf), Johor (Datuk Sabariah Ahmad), Terengganu (Zaleha Hussin) and Sabah (Datuk Norjan Khan Bahadar).

Only three State chiefs were retained - Datuk Napsiah Omar (Negri Sembilan), Mastika Junaidah Hussein (Perlis) and Saripah Aminah Syed Mohamed (Penang).

He said Rafidah did not remove the whole lot and that many of the vice-heads were retained.

"Of course, some chiefs need to be replaced by people who may be more active. But it is not a case of balas dendam (revenge)."

He said there was no reason to identify whether they were Zaharah's people or Rafidah's as all had been chosen by Umno members.

He said most of the number two posts had been retained and that he had studied the matter and was satisfied that it was not an act of revenge.

"Last time when Zaharah won, there was also a change of Wanita heads and this time, it is no different. There have to be some changes because we are talking about creating a new breed of Umno.

"The line-up, as I see, it is a mixture of old and new and they want to get on with their work," Dr Mahathir said, adding that he would be meeting the new Wanita heads soon.

On why the appointments were made almost immediately after the Umno general assembly, Dr Mahathir said there was nothing wrong with that as Rafidah had spoken to the respective Menteri Besar on the appointments.

As to whether there would be more women appointed to the supreme council, Dr Mahathir said he would consider it as there were criteria that must be taken into account.

"I have to weigh everything in the interests of Umno."

On the housewife who received HIV-contaminated blood during a blood transfusion at the Jitra Hospital in Kedah, Dr Mahathir said he was sad this had happened.

He said the Government would study the matter carefully so that such a problem would not recur.

He added that the Health Minister was expected to brief the Cabinet on it soon.

Yesterday, the Kedah Health and Medical Services Department admitted that HIV-contaminated blood was administered to a 47-year-old housewife who was being treated for menstrual problems last month.

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