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Don't be demoralised, Dr M tells senior MPs

Sarban Singh; Hayati Hayatudin

SUBANG, Sun. - Members of Parliament, especially seniors, should not be demoralised if not given important government positions.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said at times, he had to appoint non-wakil rakyat as he had to weigh several pertinent aspects.

"We have to take into account certain considerations before appointing anyone and that is why I sometimes, have to appoint non-wakil rakyat to these positions," he said upon his return from a four-day working visit to Japan.

Dr Mahathir was asked to explain why he opted to fill a Cabinet post, two Deputy Minister slots and another Parliamentary Secretary post with Senators when he could chose from many MPs.

On minor changes announced a day before his departure, the Prime Minister's office announced the appointment of Brig-Jen (rtd) Datuk Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin (Minister in the Prime's Department), Datuk Shahrizat Jalil (Women's Affairs Minister), Senator Datuk M. Kayveas (Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister), Senator Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor (Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department) and Senator Datuk Zainuddin Maidin (Information Ministry Parliamentary Secretary).

Of the five, four are members of the Senate.

Dr Mahathir said appointing Senators to top government positions was not something that had not been done.

"They may not be elected by the people but one day, they too would have to contest (in elections)," he added.

Asked why he opted to choose non-MPs, Dr Mahathir said: "How do I test them unless I appoint them. If you give me a questionnaire, I can probably give it to them."

Asked when would younger MPs be appointed to such positions, Dr Mahathir said the deserving ones would get them when the time comes.

In jest, the Prime Minister said MPs would not be demoralised for not being appointed to top positions, but it was the media which gave such an impression.

"Maybe, it's the Press which put such ideas into their heads ... now they may be demoralised."

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether there would be a Cabinet reshuffle as last week's appointments were minor.

He said it seemed like the Press would be unhappy as long as he did not sack Ministers as this meant they would be starved of news.

"What they (the media) want me to do is to chuck out the entire Cabinet and then go around looking for others to fill these positions.

"This is not a game we play. If we change someone, it does not necessarily mean the new one is better ... change is not always for the better."

Dr Mahathir said whenever he made changes to the Cabinet, it was not for the sake of changing but to achieve certain objectives.

"Maybe in some other countries, they would make changes whenever one makes a little mistake. But even after they change, nothing new happens. If there is a change, it does not mean you are going to get a better man," he said.

On another note, Dr Mahathir was asked to elaborate on his suggestions to the Japanese media to set up branch offices in Asia.

While in Osaka, he had requested the Japanese media to assign more

journalists to Southeast Asia to enable them to get accurate reports.

"Normally their reports (on Southeast Asia) are taken from Western wires. They don't have journalists here and as such, they cannot report directly but to rely on the wires."

Clarifying, Dr Mahathir said it was the Japanese who had initially suggested that Malaysian journalists be based in Osaka.

He said it was better if journalists from both sides be based in the respective areas to provide accurate reports.

Dr Mahathir was accompanied by his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali during his visit.

There, he delivered a keynote address at the Mainichi International Symposium, the first part of the "Wake Up Kansai" campaign aimed at reviving the sluggish economy in the Kansai region.

He also attended a reception in commemoration of the publication of a book based on his series of articles in the Mainichi Daily News, the "Reflections of Asia".

The articles were carried between February 1999 and June 2000.

A limited edition of 5,000 copies of the book was distributed in Japan. The book will later be translated into English and Bahasa Malaysia.

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