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New Umno Youth leaders must see appointments as responsibility

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IN announcing Umno Youth's new line-up on Tuesday, its head Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said the new leaders must not regard their appointment as an honour.

Instead, they ought to view it as a responsibility to strengthen the support for the movement, especially among the younger generation.

This is not the first time that Hishammuddin had said this. In fact, it was exactly the same thing he said in May last year when chairing his first Umno youth executive council meeting. And he has repeated it countless times.

Expectations are very high for Umno Youth to deliver, especially, in winning over the support and confidence of those in their 20s and 30s.

But a question that arises now and again is how far the new line-up would be able to achieve the movement's aims and aspirations.

A newly-elected division head said the appointments were merely a case of putting new faces and names, whose performances are unlikely to be something great or remarkable.

"There is not much of a change in the leadership. In last year's reshuffle, Hishammuddin named five new state Youth heads who have been replaced this year. What have they done during their one year tenure as the State Youth heads?

"There is not much achievement that they can be proud of. Last year, members expected a fresh change and new direction from the then heads. But in the end, things remained the same. It will be the same case with the new appointments," he said.

The division head added that Hishammuddin, in naming new Youth heads for 11 of the 13 states and replacing three of the five appointed exco council members, should have given priority to those who could serve and had good grassroots support.

"Those ought to have been the criteria. Instead, Hishammuddin opted for names that are not really popular with the ordinary members."

He pointed out that one of the new executive council members, Abdul Rauf Yusof, is in his first term as a division head while Khairy Jamaluddin does not hold any top post in the division Youth level.

They do not have good support among grassroots leaders and members. Furthermore, Abdul Rauf is widely known as Hishammuddin's strong supporter while Khairy is too young and inexperienced to hold the post.

A division information head said that Hishammuddin should not have given priority to senior division heads to lead the movement in the states.

Hishammuddin's criterion of a minimum of two terms as a division head in order to be a state head was not necessarily accurate.

"We must give importance to a person's ability to lead the movement and capability to garner support among non-party members.

"This is important in preparing Umno Youth to face the 2004 general election, especially in states now under opposition rule.

"How are we going to prepare the strategies if the state Youth heads are just not dynamic enough and the kind who would not do work on their own initiative and instead only take orders from their superior - in this case Hishammuddin?

He cited as an example the choice of Jamiluddin Junit as Malacca Youth head, saying that Ibrahim Fadzil, who had been appointed the state Youth secretary, should have been the man for the job.

This, he said, was because Ibrahim "is more aggressive and independent".

Another leader pointed out a similar case in the Federal Territory where Haidar Ali Sheikh Fadzir replaces Ahmad Fauzi Zahari as the state Youth head.

"The opposition is very strong in FT. The Youth head here must be someone who is dynamic and able to convince the young that Umno is the best choice for them."

Haidar would have difficulties getting this done as he does not have strong grassroots support as he is only known in his own division (Kepong).

"Ahmad Fauzi might not have been popular with the grassroots, but he had the strong support from the division Youth heads and was seen as a capable leader."

Hishammuddin should have selected the FT Youth head from one of his three exco members (who are from FT) as they would be in a better position to handle the tasks.

Naming Mohamad Norza Zakaria and Subahan Kamal, he said these two would have been in a far better position to strengthen FT Umno Youth and to regain the support of the Malays.

As elected exco members, they enjoy good rapport with the party's top leadership and this would help in getting the work done at the state level.

"Hishammuddin's excuse in not naming his exco members as state Youth heads is that he wants a bigger representation of Youth leaders at the national level.

"If that is true, why is he maintaining Azimi Daim, an elected exco member, as the information head and naming another exco member Wan Mohd Khairil Wan Ahmad as the new treasurer, replacing Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir who has resigned?"

Some quarters felt that some of the names were dropped from the list at the last minute because Hishammuddin was pressured from certain state leaders to do so. This, Hishammuddin has denied.

They have cited Selangor where it is widely known that the names of the proposed State deputy head and secretary were changed less than 30 minutes before the scheduled exco meeting, after an influential State leader met Hishammuddin.

Hishammuddin, in denying this a day after he announced his line-up, insisted that it was his prerogative to appoint those whom he felt suitable for the posts.

But he did not deny there were "some last minute changes" to the original list.

He also said that he was happy with the line-up and it was too early to judge whether or not these new leaders could perform as they have not been tested. "I believe that I have made the right choice until they prove me wrong."

But, a division Youth leader said the yardstick will be the next Pemuda Umno Masuk Kampung programme which will show how committed Umno Youth leaders are. Not only will the leaders be judged by their peers and the Umno Youth members, but by the people.

And it will not take long for the new leaders to know that their appointment is certainly not an honour but a responsibility.