

# Puzzle over who PM's call was for

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UNLIKE his usual outspoken self, Umno Youth exco member Azimi Daim is a little uneasy when asked about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call for leaders to step down to allow his deputy "the chance to rearrange everything."

"*Susahlah* (It will be difficult) if everyone resigns. There is no need to do that. After all, when Parliament is dissolved for elections, everyone would have automatically vacated their seats anyway," he said.

Azimi's caution is understandable because he is one of the party's new faces. The 30-something was the youngest member appointed to the Umno supreme council in the last party elections.

Mindful that his "parachute entry" might have caused discomfort among older Umno members, he treads cautiously in party matters.

So for Azimi, it is better if Prime Minister-to-be Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi started picking a "bunch of new people" from now and try to blend them in with the old.

But, he insisted, the old ones should not have to step down now.

There appeared to be some confusion whether Dr Mahathir's comments on Sunday were directed at only Umno or applied to also Barisan Nasional and the Cabinet.

Barisan secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat maintained it was for everybody and not Umno alone.

"So Barisan leaders should take heed," he said, adding that there were still a few leaders, MPs and assemblymen who go back to the time of the first two prime

ministers.

"Now with Pak Lah we are at the fifth regime (fifth Prime Minister), so how can there still be representatives from the first and second regime? People are looking for change," he says.

Like other Barisan leaders, Mohamed pointed out that voters are younger and there was a need to accommodate the aspirations of the more IT-savvy and educated generation.

He noted people on the ground were saying that some of the faces *dah lama, dah tua* (have been there too long and are old).

"As long as there is change or some semblance of change, the Government and party will look better and the people will support the Government better," he said.

Agreeing with him, Gerakan vice-president Datuk Dr S. Vijaratnam said it was important for younger voters to see younger faces because they prefer to support candidates "who are my kind of guy" who understood their needs.

But PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas believed Dr Mahathir's comments were meant more for the Cabinet.

He pointed out that the party posts (except for the few appointed seats) were elected posts and it was the same for state assembly and parliamentary seats.

Thus, having them resign from elected posts and holding elections again would only cost a lot of money and time.

"So I think the PM meant Cabinet posts. In some countries, when there is a change of leaders, the Cabinet steps down," he said.

This way, when Abdullah takes over, he gets a free hand to pick his own Cabinet rather than be "saddled" with Dr Mahathir's appointments.

A political observer who declined to be named said Dr Mahathir's comments indicated he wanted to give some leaders a "nudge."

"The PM was stating the obvious. Many of them have served for a long time. Many people, rightly or wrongly, want new blood," he said.

However, the political observer maintained that if one looked at past transitions, there was "never a wholesale clearing of the Cabinet."

And being president of a major Barisan component party too did not necessarily translate into a Cabinet appointment.

For example, Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik was Gerakan president from 1980 but was only appointed minister in 1986.

Other than the Cabinet, other posts where Abdullah could make changes before the elections are the Umno state liaison committees and appointed seats in the Umno supreme council.

Recently, Dr Mahathir announced a shake-up in the Kelantan Umno state committee to bring in fresh faces. Other states were now considering possible reshuffles.

Information chief Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayob described the offer by other Umno state leaders to step down as sincere and open.

As for change, most said there should be a mix of new and old - the young to give vitality and new ideas and the old their experience.

Mohamed believed Abdullah is wise enough to know what would make a good mixture.

"It would have the right ingredients for a better cake. It would be a new cake but a nice one," he said.