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Kelantan Umno shake-up (HL)

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KOTA BARU, Thurs. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today announced a major shake-up of Kelantan Umno with the dropping of deputy head Datuk Annuar Musa and three other key office-bearers.

However, the position of Datuk Mustapa Mohamed as the State Umno chief remains.

The revamp is seen as a move to prepare the party to do battle in the Pas-ruled State in the next general election.

Annuar's place has been taken over by Kota Baru Umno division chief Zaid Ibrahim, a vocal lawyer based in Kuala Lumpur.

Along with Annuar, the former Rural Development Minister who had held the deputy's post since 1990, others axed were Tuan Hashim Tuan Yaacob as secretary, Datuk Nik Hussain Ab Rahman (treasurer) and Datuk Ismail Mamat (information chief).

Replacing them are former Geting Assemblyman Mat Nawawi Mat Jusoh, who is also Tumpat deputy division chief, Tenaga Nasional chairman Datuk Awang Adek Hussin (Bachok deputy division chief) and Peringat deputy division chief Che Alwi Che Ahmad, respectively.

Speaking at the end of his two-day visit to Kelantan, Dr Mahathir said members of the Kelantan Umno liaison committee supported the new appointments.

"As the party president, I have the right to appoint the liaison committee chairman and his deputy. The other posts are appointed by the liaison chairman.

"All the other committee members agreed (on the new appointments) and promised to give their support."

Kelantan Umno had since last year been embroiled in numerous controversies, starting with an attempted "coup" in March by 12 of the 14 division heads who wanted Mustapa replaced as the liaison chief. The following month, Mustapa announced his resignation as Umno's national information chief to concentrate on Kelantan.

In May, Mustapa announced the appointments of Tuan Hashim and Ismail as State Umno secretary and information chief, positions they held until their removal as announced by Dr Mahathir today.

Dr Mahathir said the changes did not mean that those dropped had not performed their job well, but that others should also be given a chance to hold those positions.

He also said the appointment of Zaid as deputy chairman was his personal choice.

To a question whether the changes would ensure more support for Umno in the State, the Prime Minister said the party had already got the support but changes had to be made from time to time.

On a different issue pertaining to reports that Terengganu Government leaders had met him in Putrajaya to ask that the Maktab Rendah Sains Mara-Yayasan Terengganu in Dungun and Besut be retained, Dr Mahathir said he only met State Executive Councillor Datuk Mustafa Ali.

"We exchanged views on the political scene in the State, including the issue, but no decision was made."