

Mixed reactions from politicians

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KUALA LUMPUR: Political leaders have given the creation of the new Women's Affairs Ministry a "thumbs up."

However, while those from the ruling Barisan Nasional welcomed the other appointments in the revised Cabinet lineup announced on Wednesday, opposition politicians said they were disappointed that the expected changes did not come about.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has appointed Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil to head the new ministry.

He also named Malaysia Islamic Development Department (Jakim) director-general Datuk Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

Two deputy ministers were appointed — Senator Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor in the Prime Minister's Department and People's Progressive Party (PPP) President Senator Datuk M. Kayveas in the Housing and Local

Government Ministry.

Former group chief editor of *Utusan Melayu* Senator Datuk Zainuddin Maidin was appointed as parliamentary secretary to the Information Ministry.

Welcoming the new ministry, Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said women's issues would now be given prominence by the public and decision-makers.

He said the timely decision by the Prime Minister reflected society's increased awareness of the plights and discrimination faced by women at the workplace and at home.

He said there were three women serving in the state's executive council: Datuk Kee Phaik Cheen, who is in charge of tourism, culture, arts and women's development, Jahara Hamid — in charge of youths and sports, information and national unity while State Legal Adviser Datuk Alizatul Khair Osman Khairuddin serves as an ex-officio in the council.

Kedah Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain said the new appointments showed the Government's commitment to continue giving equal representation to all races.

Pahang Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob pointed out that there were now more female students in institutes of higher learning and several key posts in the Government were being held by women.

"Women have important roles in the society and a ministry set up specially for them is a deserving tribute to the women," Adnan told reporters after opening a K-economy seminar in Kuantan yesterday.

Umno Youth deputy chief Datuk Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzil said with the new ministry, women's issues could be channelled directly to the Cabinet.

Shahrizat's appointment would help protect the rights of women, he told reporters in Kuala Terengganu.

He also welcomed Hamid's

appointment as Minister in the Prime Minister's department, saying that Hamid could help strengthen Islamic development in the country.

He said the appointment of People's Progressive Party (PPP) president Senator Datuk M. Kayveas as Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister was a recognition of the party's contribution to national development.

Kelantan Mentri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat said more important now was whether the Cabinet could adapt itself to current demands of the people.

On the Women's Affairs Ministry, Nik Aziz said he did not feel that Kelantan should come up with something similar because "there is not much problem with women here."

"But I will study the situation to determine whether such a committee is needed," he said, while stressing that the state would not simply adopt whatever that is practised by the Federal Govern-

ment.

The DAP welcomed the creation of the ministry, stating that it had made such a proposal before.

However, Lim described the appointments as a great disappointment.

He said he was sad that an E-minister was not appointed to take overall charge of the national information age agenda.

"Apart from the creation of a Women's Affairs Ministry, the reshuffle was a non-event," he said.

Wanita DAP chairman Chong Eng alleged that the ministry was created by Umno in its attempt to wean away women support from opposition parties.

However, she welcomed the setting up of the ministry, saying that the party had proposed such a ministry as early as 1991.

She hoped Shahrizat would implement affirmative actions such as ensuring that at least 30% of representation in deci-

sion-making bodies are women.

Parti Keadilan Nasional described the new ministry as "long-awaited by Malaysians."

Its Wanita chief Fuziah Salleh said she viewed the ministry as positive.

"However, it must be above any political or personal agenda" she said.

Parti Reformasi Insan Malaysia (PRIM) welcomed the appointment of Kayveas as a deputy minister.

PRIM said Umno had shown that it was moving forward to forge national unity and national integrity.

The Malaysian Youth Council said the creation of the new ministry was a milestone and a positive move towards recognition of women's roles in national development.

It proposed that women be given more powers to decide matters involving themselves, their children and their future.