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Minor Cabinet changes should not political grapevine abuzz

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THE anticipated major re-shuffle did not come. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad decided to keep the changes in the Cabinet minor.

Actually, it should not come as a surprise because he had said on several occasions prior to the announcement yesterday, that the changes are not going to be extensive.

And true to what he had said, the changes are indeed minimal, involving two Ministers, a deputy Minister and a parliamentary secretary.

Such a minor re-shuffle will definitely not send the political grapevine tingling overtime.

However, in the first place, are Cabinet reshuffles supposed to excite people or to ensure that the job gets done?

Views contrast on this as an exciting (to be read major) to some would make the public excited while minor changes would not capture the imagination of the citizenry.

For others however, major changes may lead to too much speculation, creating doubts and uncertainties especially in terms of the government's policies.

If comparison were to be made with neighbouring Indonesia where her president Abdurrahman Wahid a.k.a Gus Dur, since he took over the helm in the end of 1999 seems to be keen in making changes to his Cabinet.

No doubt, some of the changes came about because of resignations apart from his own choice.

But, until today, Indonesia is still warped in a struggle for a clear direction and even Gus Dur's position seems to be as precarious as some members of his Cabinet who had fallen out of favour.

Back in Malaysia, the decision to create the Women's Affairs Ministry is something which most quarters, especially those who had been fighting over the plight of the fairer sex, will feel it is high time the nation had one.

It is now up to Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil to make good of the portfolio. After all, she had been quite vocal over women's issues.

Interesting also is the appointment of Pusat Islam director-general Brig-Jen Datuk Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin to succeed his namesake Datuk Seri Dr Abdul Hamid Othman as the Minister in the Prime Minister's department.

Apart from sharing the same name, the new Minister also shares the same credentials as both were former director-general of Pusat Islam.

Dr Hamid resigned from the Ministerial post on Jan 15.

The post which is generally accepted as a Minister responsible for the nation's Islamic affairs has of late been viewed as a crucial position especially in the wake of the use of mosques for politically-laced sermons.

A heavy task lies ahead for the new Hamid as efforts to "neutralise" the mosques from being pulpits to deliver political speeches which are spewed with hatred had not been effective.

But before he can proceed with his plans to overcome these problems, he would first have to be made a senator before assuming the post.

Another new appointment is Umno executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Mansor as the Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's department.

Though a new face in so far as being involved in the government, his appointment did not come as a surprise as he had been tipped to be

involved in the Cabinet re-shuffle when he was made a senator on Dec 13 last year.

While these appointments can be considered "all within the family", the appointment of PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas as the Deputy Minister of Housing and Local Government can be deemed as being done in the Barisan Nasional spirit.

Some may view it as a recognition to PPP which had been struggling to be a player in the coalition. On the other hand, it can just be another one of BN's politics of accommodation.

Last but not least is the appointment of veteran journalist Datuk Zainuddin Maidin as the parliamentary secretary of the Information Ministry.

It can be seen as a recognition to the role of journalists in nation building.

For Zainuddin, he joins the ranks of journalists before him who made it to the government such as Datuk Khalid Yunus and Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail.

All said, now that the reshuffle is done, ministers, deputy ministers and parliamentary secretaries who had been wondering whether they were on their way out should feel relieved.

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