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Two new faces in Cabinet (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Two new faces have been brought into the Cabinet in an exercise which saw the creation of a new Ministry and the entry of the People's Progressive Party in the Government.

No Ministers were dropped or had their portfolios changed.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Shahrizat Jalil was named to head the newly-created Women's Affairs Ministry while Department of Islamic Advancement or Pusat Islam director-general Brig-Jen (Rtd) Datuk Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin was appointed Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

He succeeds Senator Datuk Seri Dr Abdul Hamid Othman who resigned early this month.

The exercise also marked the first representation of the PPP in the Government since its inception in 1953 with its president Senator Datuk M. Kayveas being appointed the Deputy Minister of Housing and Local Government.

The other new faces in the Government are Umno executive secretary Tengku Datuk Adnan Tengku Mansor and former journalist Senator Datuk Zainuddin Maidin.

Tengku Adnan was appointed Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department while Zainuddin was named Information Ministry Parliamentary Secretary, a post which was not filled after the last general election.

The changes were announced in a statement by the Prime Minister's Office today.

Meanwhile, Bernama quoted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying that Shahrizat was made Women's Affairs Minister because of strong pressure calling for the creation of such a new ministry.

"Indeed we value the contribution of women and their role and that is why we created a new ministry," he told reporters after attending a Hari Raya reception with staff of the Prime Minister's Office here today.

Dr Mahathir was approached to comment on the appointment of two Ministers, two Deputy Ministers and a Parliamentary Secretary.

Asked whether Shahrizat would have a deputy, Dr Mahathir said he had not thought of the matter yet. "We think that for the time being it suffices to have only a Minister for the ministry," he said.

The appointment of the Ministers and Deputy Ministers takes effect on Jan 30 upon their swearing in before the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah at Istana Negara on that day.

Zainuddin, who is leaving for Washington tomorrow to witness the inauguration of US President George W. Bush as a guest of the Republican Party, will take the oath of office before Dr Mahathir on Jan 30 at the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya.

The two-page statement said the Prime Minister had informed the Yang di-Pertuan Agong of the appointments.

This follows the resignation of Abdul Hamid Othman as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department on Jan 15.

The appointment of Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin, who will first be appointed a Senator before assuming office, has also been consented to by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the statement added.