

Women's group pooh-poohs Najib's new role
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A coalition of women's rights groups has expressed dismay that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has assumed the role of acting women, family and community development minister.

In a statement today, the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) said this undermines the Najib administration's commitment towards ensuring that women occupy 30 percent of decision-making positions.

"It makes a mockery of all the time, effort and resources that have been poured into making this a reality," said the group.

The group said Najib has effectively returned to the pre-2001 era in which women's affairs were placed directly under the purview of the Prime Minister's Department.

"From our experience, women's affairs languished at the bottom of the pile when it used to be located in this office," said the group.

Najib announced that he would serve as acting women, family and community development minister, taking over from scandal-tainted Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, with effect from April 9.

'Has BN no one else?'

JAG said there should be a dedicated Women's Ministry to focus on women's issues, and that these should not compete for attention with other important groups such as the elderly, children, Orang Asli and persons with disabilities.

"Does this move mean that after 55 years of being in power, there is really no one else within the BN component parties who is capable of taking over the women's portfolio?"

"If so, what does this mean for Malaysian women when the women's leadership within the ruling government cannot be entrusted to take charge of our concerns?"

JAG also expressed surprise that none of the women's wings of BN component parties have protested the reduction in women's representation in the cabinet.

They argued that this suggests that these women's wings remain subservient to male interests within the ruling political parties.

"Or does this mean that after 55 years of being in power, the government - and in particular, the prime minister - is finally taking Malaysian women seriously?" they asked.

