

## **Najib hires yet another minister-level adviser**

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has further expanded his team of minister-level advisers, this time bringing on Wanita MCA chief Heng Seai Kie as special adviser for the implementation of the National Unity Blueprint.

She is officially the fifth special adviser to join Najib's team and is tasked with overseeing the implementation of the unity blueprint.

Heng is quoted as by Oriental Daily as saying that she will report directly to the prime minister.

While her task appears similar to the portfolio of Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Joseph Kurup (photo), who is in charge of national unity, Heng said the two of them will focus on their respective territories.

"As Joseph Kurup is an East Malaysian leader, he understands East Malaysia better while I will handle national unity issues in West Malaysia, so as to effectively implement various national unity programmes," she said.

Heng was previously deputy minister of women, family and community development, but relinquished the position in 2012 after her senatorship expired.

According to a May 19 parliamentary written reply, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Shahidan Kassim said Najib already has four minister-level advisers in his team, prior to Heng's entry.

They are Abdullah Md Zin, Mohd Johari Baharum, Rais Yatim and Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

Najib had come under criticism for hiring advisers with perks and roles similar to other ministers, which is seen as a backdoor attempt to bring political allies into the government.

### **Overlapping portfolios**

In 2013, when Shahrizat was appointed as special adviser to the prime minister on women's issues, her role also appeared to overlap with Women, Family and Community Development Minister Rohani Karim.

Tourism and Culture Minister Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz, a close ally of Najib, had defended the appointment then, giving a similar reason that Rohani was from Sarawak and that her work did not cover Peninsular Malaysia much.

Rohani did not appear pleased with this and when she was asked to respond, she merely said, "That's his opinion. It's an appointment by the Prime Minister's Department. I don't

want to comment on that."

The minister-level advisers do not include other advisers in Najib's public relations team, the details of which remain sketchy.

Among a prominent adviser in Najib's public relations team is British national Paul Stadlen (photo).

However, the government did not acknowledge Stadlen's role, merely stating, in the same May 19 parliamentary written reply, that he was not paid by the government.

More recently, Lim Kok Wing was also revealed to have been appointed as a Special Programmes Coordinator for Najib.

It has not been made clear whether Lim's appointment is similar to that of the other five minister-level advisers.

Lim's appointment is seen as Putrajaya's bid to mount a counteroffensive on the 1MDB issue.

Najib has been on the defensive following relentless attacks from former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who has made claims of financial misappropriation in the Finance Ministry-owned company.

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