

PM unveils 'trimmed-down' cabinet
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breaking news Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today announced his 'trimmed-down' cabinet.

abdullah ahmad badawi 2008 cabinet line up 180308 06During a 20-minute press conference at his office in Putrajaya, Abdullah said he has decided not to appoint any parliamentary secretaries - bringing the number of appointments down from 90 to 68.

"This means that the ministers and the deputy ministers will have to be more active in parliament," he said.

He has also dropped many notable veterans and roped in new faces, who now make up half of the cabinet.

"I hope they can serve the people effectively," he told journalists.

Those axed are veteran leaders Rafidah Aziz, Jamaluddin Jarjis, Azmi Khalid, Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor and Radzi Sheikh Ahmad, who is known to be close to the prime minister.

PM still finance minister

The premier has dropped his portfolio of internal security and outgoing foreign minister Syed Hamid Albar will run a newly merged Home Affairs and Internal Security Ministry.

abdullah ahmad badawi 2008 cabinet line up 180308 05This reduced the number of ministries by one to 27. The number of ministers however remain unchanged - the cabinet is still 32-member strong.

Abdullah has also retained his finance portfolio and Nor Mohamed Yakcop will continue to serve as second finance minister.

His previous cabinet had a whopping 32 ministers, 39 deputy ministers and 20 parliamentary secretaries, with jobs handed out to many of the 14 race-based parties that make up the Barisan Nasional coalition.

Of the 32 posts, Umno has the lion share, a total of 22, while MCA (4), MIC (1), PBB (1), Supp (1), Upko (1) and PBS (1).

While Sabah and Sarawak delivered close to 40 percent of the parliament seats to BN, collectively they have a little over 10 percent of the cabinet posts.

Zaid Ibrahim a new face

zaid ibrahim interview 140308 04Among the interesting new faces are Zaid Ibrahim (left), who has been appointed minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of legal affairs.

According to Abdullah, Zaid will be put in charge of legal affairs and oversee reforms in the judiciary.

Only 16 of the 32 ministers in the previous cabinet have been retained - with eight keeping their old posts while eight moved to new portfolios.

Among them are Dr Rais Yatim, who has been named foreign minister and Ong Tee Keat (transport minister).

Shahrir returns to cabinet, Muhd Taib makes comeback

shahrir samad 250907 Making a return to the cabinet is Shahrir Samad (right) who is appointed domestic trade and consumer affairs minister.

Also back from the political wilderness is Muhammad Muhd Taib, who is now rural development minister. Muhd Taib quit as Selangor menteri besar in 1997 after he was charged for breaching Australian financial regulations in bringing in huge amount of undeclared cash. He was later acquitted.

Meanwhile, Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud's son Sulaiman has been appointed deputy tourism minister.

Khairy not in the line-up

Umno Youth deputy chief Khairy Jamaluddin was not named in the cabinet line up announced by his father-in-law.

khairy jamaluddin interview 011107 assures Prior to the elections, it was speculated that Khairy - the 32-year-old Oxford graduate - will be given an important post.

However, the March 8 polls reversed his fortunes. Many blamed the young politician for BN's disastrous performance.

Since then, pressure had mounted on the prime minister not to include his son-in-law in the line-up.

In an immediate reaction this evening, Khairy said he was not disappointed for being left out from the new cabinet line-up.

"I do not have any aspirations to become a minister as long as Abdullah is prime minister," he told reporters.

Ka Chuan takes over from brother

ong ka chuan MCA secretary-general Ong Ka Chuan (left) has been made housing and local government minister replacing his brother and MCA president Ka Ting.

Party vice-president Ong Tee Keat is transport minister replacing deputy president Chan Kong Choy. Youth chief Liow Tiong Lai is health minister and Women's wing chief Dr Ng Yen Yen is women, family and development minister.

MCA was also trounced in the elections. The party only managed to retain 15 out of its 40 parliamentary seats.

MIC loses Works Ministry

MIC failed to retain its control over the works ministry and party's secretary-general Dr S Subramaniam has been appointed human resources minister.

The previous works minister was MIC president S Samy Vellu. The party suffered heavy losses in the March 8 polls, losing six out of nine parliamentary seats and 12 out of 19 state seats.

MIC information chief M Saravanan has been appointed deputy federal territories minister while central working committee (CWC) member S Devamany is deputy natural resources and mining minister.

Rafidah dropped: No explanation

abdullah ahmad badawi pak lah pc 060607 rafidahRafidah (file photo, far right), who has held the trade portfolio since 1987, was the highest-profile casualty of the reshuffle.

Abdullah would not comment on the departure of Rafidah - also chief of Umno's influential women's wing - who is to be replaced by outgoing agriculture minister Muhyiddin Yasin.

"I don't discuss why. I think she should make way for someone new," he said.

Abdullah: I'm not quitting

Abdullah reiterated his insistence on staying in power, saying he had been given "a very strong mandate".

"I am not going to shirk my responsibilities," he said, adding that in his new term he would focus on implementing the many projects launched during the outgoing administration.

He said he was well aware of criticism that he had plenty of good policies but that his administration was "very short on implementation".

No evidence Najib is corrupt

najib arms procurement defense 290307 sukhoi submarineThe premier defended his deputy and heir-apparent Najib Razak against allegations of wrongdoing in military contracts, and said they had the "best of relationships".

"There is no proof that Najib is involved in any corrupt activities," he said.

"People can make all kinds of allegations, but what is important is that there is no evidence of that."

Najib has been accused of benefitting from the multi-billion ringgit purchases of Sukhoi jets from Russia and two submarines from France.

Dissenting voices brought in

Political observers commended the reshuffle, and particularly the decision to bring in dissenting voices including Zaid, who has been a leading critic on social and human rights issues.

Zaid was refused permission to contest the March 8 polls but will now be appointed to the upper house and given the important role of de facto minister in charge of law, with the task of reforming the judiciary.

Another Umno maverick, Shahrir, who was dropped as chairman of the coalition backbenchers' club for voting against the government, has been given the sensitive domestic trade and consumer affairs portfolio.

From the private sector, leading banker Amirsham Aziz has been appointed a minister in the prime minister's department, and will head the government's Economic Planning Unit.

Zaid, Amirsham and Mashitah - all of whom are not MPs - were sworn in as senators this afternoon so that they could take their oath as ministers before the Agong tomorrow.

Reactions from political observer

"It shows a refreshing change of face, it shows that the PM at least would like to give the impression that he is changing some of the old guard," said Tricia Yeoh from the Centre for Public Policy Studies think-tank.

"Rafidah is the epitome of the old guard within Umno," she said, pointing to graft allegations that have surrounded the veteran politician.

However, Yeoh said the reshuffle may not defuse the pressure on Abdullah, who faces a resurgent opposition and a looming battle for his political life at ruling party elections later this year.

Meanwhile, at a press conference after the cabinet announcement, Najib said that new team has a good mix of new and old faces.