

Pak Lah still bogged down by factionalism
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I refer to the Malaysiakini report
PM unveils 'trimmed-down' cabinet.

One of the interesting aspects in the announcement of the new cabinet is the appointment of Shahrizat Abdul Jalil as special advisor to the prime minister with the status of a minister for women and social development affairs.

However, in the full list of cabinet released, Ng Yen Yen of MCA was listed as the minister for women, family and community development affairs. Women affairs is very important ministry as more than half of our population is from the fairer sex. But to have two ministers handling the same matter is not sensible.

The two positions are redundant. Shahrizat was quite well-liked and hardworking too. Unfortunately, she lost in the last general election. If her expertise is needed to ensure a continuity in the ministry, she could probably be made just an advisor to the ministry without being given a ministerial rank. As it stands, with two ministers covering the same scope of duty, and if there is a policy clash over matters, who will have the last say?? There is a Chinese saying that a mountain cannot have two tigers.

Besides, appointing an extra minister would cost the rakyat at least a six figure sum every year in tax money. The basic remuneration aside, a minister is given allowance for almost everything. Besides this, a minister is assigned an official driver, bodyguard, a police officer in attendance, a political secretary who himself is given an official car and driver, a SUSK (Setiausaha Sulit Kanan), a SUS, a press secretary, clerical staff and so on. All these staff are in turn are given allowances to accompany their boss on his or her trip outstation or overseas.

A minister also commands special allowances to give out to the people (in most cases, these allowances are channelled to supporters and cronies), not to mention the pension of the minister and his staff, health and medical expenses, overseas trips.

It would be good to trim down the number of ministers further. Even developed countries with bigger populations than Malaysia do not have as many ministers as Malaysia. We now have 32, compared with the UK which has only 22 full ministers. Do not forget the UK has more than 60 million in population and has a budget many times bigger than ours.

In fact, I thought this is the best time to chop and trim the cabinet further, and give more ministerial lots to East Malaysia which was given only about 10 % of all the ministerial posts. I would say that by looking at the cabinet appointments, it is still a case of Umno's dominance over other component parties.

By trimming down the cabinet further, the PM could have sent a signal of his intention to cut down on unnecessary expenses and wastage. It could have signalled a new resolve to spend carefully the money of the people. It could have sent a message to all that the PM does not entertain factional interests any more but only the interest of the people. The money saved could have been used to build schools and subsidise the poor and needy for food.

I think the PM is still being bogged down by factional interests and politics of patronage.

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