

## **Mixed reviews**

Abdul Razak Ahmad  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 14: The Cabinet reshuffle received mixed reviews from several political observers.

Abdul Razak Baginda, executive director of the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre, said many who had expected major changes were disappointed.

He said the fact that the reshuffle was not major indicated that the Prime Minister was comfortable with the current line-up and he was giving them time to deliver.

"As the saying goes, 'changing horses mid-stream' may not be a good thing," he said.

While there was intense speculation about who would be dropped and included, the reshuffle, said Razak, followed some basic parameters.

"Apart from balancing the usual political and State considerations, in the end it came down to filling the vacancy in the Federal Territories Ministry following the resignation of Tan Sri Isa Abdul Samad, giving others an opportunity to resign, and promoting some experienced figures.

"Pak Lah chose people who have been in the Government system rather than looking outside the system."

Dr Chandra Muzaffar, president of the International Movement for a Just World, said: "One should not expect much from any Cabinet reshuffle, because the options available to any Prime Minister are limited.

"He (the Prime Minister) has to choose from among the members of both houses of parliament available and there would be a variety of other considerations he has to take into account, especially since he helms an inter-party and inter-ethnic coalition like the Barisan Nasional," he said.

Chandra, however, had reservations about the reshuffle.

He could not see how the reshuffle would help the Prime Minister achieve his goal of combating corruption and uniting the diverse communities.

"I cannot see how he can achieve this goal, which is an important mission to him."

Professor Datuk Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, who heads Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation, said one way to understand the reshuffle was to study the various factors the Prime Minister has to take into account when deciding on the appointments.

The first is to maintain Umno's interests in terms of Cabinet representation.

This, noted Shamsul, could explain why Kadir and Shafie, the two ministers from Umno who did not manage to win seats in the party supreme council at the Umno election in September 2004, were not in the Cabinet.

"Most of the relevant Umno supreme council members are now represented in the Cabinet. In a way, the reshuffle again confirms how selections need to take into account the political dimension," said Shamsul.

Despite the diversity of views, all three observers were in agreement about one person - Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, whose appointment as Higher Education Minister replacing Shafie, was seen as a positive move.

"If there is one change which I would personally welcome, it is the appointment of Mustapa.

"I think Mustapa has the credentials, and his consultative style is most welcome in heading the ministry," said Chandra.

"Mustapa is an all-rounder, who knows economics and finance, and he has valuable experience that can help uplift the country's higher education sector," said Shamsul.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, Higher Education Minister**

"As the Higher Education Minister, I look forward to working with the staff of the ministry, universities and other institutions of higher learning to continue to enhance the quality of education. Having served as Minister of Entrepreneur Development (1995-1999) and the Minister in charge of Economic Planning since April 2004, I hope to use my experience in my new capacity."

Background: Mustapa graduated in economics from Melbourne University, Australia, and completed his masters, also in economics, from Boston University in the US. He became a senator in 1991 and was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Finance Ministry. He was promoted to Deputy Finance Minister in 1994. The following year, he won the Jeli parliamentary seat and was made Entrepreneur Development Minister. In 1998, he was appointed Second Finance Minister. He gave up the post when he lost the Jeli seat in the 1999 election. In 2000, he became the economic adviser to the Ministry of Finance and executive director of the National Economic Action Council the following year. In 2004, he won back the Jeli seat and was appointed Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

### **Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid, Natural Resources and Environment Minister (formerly Home Affairs Minister)**

"I am thankful to the Prime Minister for giving me the chance to continue serving the Government. The Prime Minister has been wanting to do certain things and to fulfil his vision, and it is our duty to work towards that."

Background: Azmi, 65, was elected Padang Besar MP in 1995 after which he was appointed Parliamentary Secretary in the Prime Minister's Department. From 1997, he served as Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister, later becoming the Deputy Home Affairs Minister. In 1999, he was appointed Rural Development Minister but was returned to the Home Affairs Ministry as minister in 2004.

### **Datuk Zulhasnan Rafique, Federal Territories Minister (formerly Deputy FT Minister)**

"I am still in shock. The post is an honour, a mandate given to me by the Prime Minister. It is a strategic ministry as it consists of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya and it is critical to have positive changes in these States."

Background: Born in Kuala Lumpur in 1954, he received his early education at La Salle High School in Petaling Jaya. After retiring from the Royal Malaysian Air Force, where he started his career as a fighter pilot in 1972, he went into business. In 1999, he became the MP for Wangsa Maju and held the post of deputy chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Presently, he is the MP for Setiawangsa and deputy chairman of the Umno Federal Territories Liaison committee.

**Datuk Zainuddin Maidin, Information Minister (formerly Deputy Information Minister)**

"It's unexpected. This appointment is beyond my expectation."

Background: Zainuddin, who is the Merbok Member of Parliament, had been Deputy Information Minister since 2002. Popularly known as Zam among media practitioners, he began his journalistic career as a freelance reporter for Warta Negara and rose to become editor-in-chief of Utusan Malaysia. In 1994, Zainuddin, was made executive chairman of Utusan Publications & Distributions Sdn Bhd. He was a senator between 1998 and 2004.

Source:

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