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PRIME NEWS

5 ministers replaced in cabinet reshuffle

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TOUGH DECISION:

Nothing more important than the people, says Najib

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak overhauled his cabinet yesterday, naming Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi as his new No. 2 and replacing four other cabinet ministers in a bid to ensure a solid team in governing the nation.

The reshuffle, widely seen as bold and drastic, was not totally unexpected.

Najib has to consolidate the government and the party's positions as he leads Barisan Nasional into the next general election by 2018 and deliver the people's mandate.

The most shocking move, and by Najib's own admission, the most difficult decision, was Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin being replaced with Zahid as deputy prime min-

ister, a position Muhyiddin has held since April 2009.

In announcing the new line-up at a press conference at his office here, Najib said the decision to drop Muhyiddin, who is No. 2 in Umno and Pagoh member of parliament, was a "very difficult one" but said it was necessary to ensure a solid cabinet team "moving in the same direction".

He said the decision to drop Muhyiddin, four other ministers and one deputy minister, and the changing of portfolios were made after taking into account the political consideration and the interest of the administration.

Zahid, 62, a veteran politician and one of the three Umno elected vice-presidents, retains his Home Ministry portfolio.

Najib, who is Umno president and BN chairman, said he welcomed vigorous discourse and accepted criticisms as part of the decision-making process.

"However, cabinet members should not air their differences in an open forum that can affect public opinion against the government and the nation. It is also contrary to the concept of collective responsibility," he said.

Muhyiddin has been quite outspoken in closed sessions on the



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak with newly-appointed Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi at the Perdana Putra Complex in Putrajaya yesterday. Bernama pic

IMDB issue, and it is an open secret that Najib and his deputy did not see eye to eye on how the issue involving the strategic development firm should be handled.

But, Muhyiddin had on Sunday delivered a scathing speech at the Cheras Umno meeting that BN would lose a general election if it was called now due to IMDB.

Najib thanked Muhyiddin, who was also education minister, for all his work and contributions to the government and country. He also thanked the others who were dropped.

"I believe that the new cabinet line-up will drive forward the government's ability to deliver on our promises to the people in the last general election.

"Nothing is more important than the needs of Malaysia and its people. I will always put their interests above all others," he said.

Najib said he was also confident that in time, the new cabinet would increase public confidence in the government and BN ahead of the 14th general election.

Muhyiddin, in his comments on Facebook, said he accepted the decision with an open heart.

"I respect the prime minister's prerogative powers to appoint and drop any cabinet ministers."

He said while in service, he had always supported all government policies and the leadership of the prime minister, "except in the issue of IMDB, I stick to my own principles and stand".

He is due to give a press conference at 11am today.

Zahid said he accepted the DPM position as part of his responsibility.

"The role is not a gift, but a responsibility. I understand that the decision to reshuffle the cabinet is a difficult one for the prime minister and I implore my friends in the cabinet, Umno supreme council, division heads and others to lend their support to the prime minister."

The newly-appointed ministers were Tuaran MP Datuk Wilfred Madius Tangau (Science, Technology and Innovation), Larut MP Datuk

Hamzah Zainudin (Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism), Santubong MP Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (Natural Resources and Environment), Padang Terap MP Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid (Education), Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Salleh Said Keruak (Communications and Multimedia), Tanjung Malim MP Datuk Seri Ong Ka Chuan (International Trade and Industry II) and Pengerang MP Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said (Prime Minister's Department).

Apart from Muhyiddin and Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, who was rural and regional development minister, Datuk Seri Hasan Malek (Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism), Datuk Seri G. Palanivel (Natural Resources and Environment) and Dr Ewon Ebin (Science, Technology and Innovation) were also dropped.

The new cabinet ministers and deputy ministers are due to be sworn in before the king at Istana Negara at 10am today.