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# PM consolidates hold on power

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The Cabinet reshuffle was not major but it was highly significant in further strengthening the Prime Minister's hand following the wins in Sarawak and the recent by-elections.

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analysis



THREE words best sum up the Cabinet reshuffle: consolidate, reward and checkmate.

Consolidation in the sense that the new line-up now comprises people who Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak is absolutely comfortable with and can work with without always having to look behind his back.

"The Prime Minister is consolidating his position and his team. They are people who he can trust, rely on and work with as a team," said Umno expert Dr Azmi Omar.

Najib's team is now overwhelmingly composed of people who will not sabotage him or conspire with the opposition to undermine him, his government and his party.

The appointments also suggest that he has rewarded those who have performed as well as those who stuck their necks out and defended him throughout his *annus horribilis*, when he was almost swamped by the 1MDB.

This was apparent in the appointment of Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of the Economic Planning Unit.

Abdul Rahman showed his mettle and took the hits on behalf of his boss. In recent months, he has also risen to the occasion to take on Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng who people tend to steer clear of because of his habit of suing.

It was a big step up for Abdul Rahman from his previous Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government portfolio.

It was also a big day for Sabah and, Abdul Rahman, often known as the "Twitter Minister", responded to his promotion by tweeting that he is the first Sabahan to be given the EPU portfolio.

The reshuffle saw the appointment of four new ministers and six new deputy ministers.

Selangor Umno chief Tan Sri Noh Omar took over Abdul Rahman's former portfolio.

Noh's appointment was clearly a reward for Barisan Nasional's amazing win in the recent Sungai Besar by-election and also to give a boost to Umno in Selangor.

Noh described it as *rezeki Selangor* or wind-fall for the state. This Noh's second shot as a minister and his return to prime-time politics goes to show the revolving door nature of politics.

The other man to watch is new Finance Minister II Datuk Johari Ghani who was a big name in the corporate world before coming into politics.

The Titivangsa MP takes over from Datuk Seri Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah whose decision to step aside stunned many people.

Ahmad Husni also relinquished all his political appointments yesterday and his dramatic exit is bound to be the subject of discussion in the next few days.

Johari is on the fast track having been appointed Deputy Finance Minister only last year.

But the trained accountant is seen as someone who understands finance and has won admirers for the way he conducts himself in Parliament.

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Minister Datuk Seri Mah Siew Keong's move to the Plantation Industries and Commodities portfolio from the Prime Minister's Department was seen as an acknowledgement of Gerakan's role in the by-election wins. Mah is Gerakan president and Teluk Intan MP.

"The Chinese vote has started to return and the Prime Minister has to reciprocate. He needs to show that support comes with posts and access to the Government," said Dr Azmi.

And finally, the checkmate – and this is where the political animal in Najib comes into play.

The appointment of Jerlun MP Datuk Othman Aziz as Deputy Finance Minister was to inject some counter-balance in Kedah and, more specifically, in the Jerlun division where Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir used to be Umno division chief.

Najib is sending a message to Kedah that no one is indispensable and that it is time to move on. Othman was named the acting Jerlun chief shortly after the sacking of Mukhriz from Umno last week.

The appointment of Silam MP Datu Nasrun Datu Mansor as Deputy Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities was to checkmate the influence of Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal in the eastern stretch of Sabah.

Nasrun is now "equipped" to take on Datuk Yusof Apdal, Shafie's younger brother who is Silam Umno chief.

Nasrun and Yusof had clashed in the past for control of Silam Umno. His new post will help Nasrun counter the influence of Yusof and Shafie in these parts.

The noise level among Sarawak politicians has gone up.

The state expected a minister's post to replace Datuk Seri Douglas Unggah but only got Henry Sum Agong being made Deputy Minister of Domestic Trade, Consumerism and Cooperatives.

The talk is that Najib will compensate Sarawak with other appointments because there are already five Sarawakians in the Cabinet.

The reshuffle is not major but the changes are very significant.

Najib's post-2013 Cabinet was widely seen as an "inherited Cabinet".

He did not win well in the general election and could not make bold or sweeping appointments.

But a lot has changed in the past one year. The Sarawak victory and the by-election wins have fortified his position and the appointments show that he has taken note of the changing political landscape.

The enemies from within are gone and he has further strengthened his hand. The man is here to stay, he means business and it is best not to "play-play" with him.