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Focus shifts to Cabinet

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PM needs to fill vacancies after S'wak polls and by-elections

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PUTRAJAYA: Attention has now shifted to the highly anticipated Cabinet reshuffle following the Sarawak state election and the by-elections of Kuala Kangsar and Sungai Besar.

Two ministerial posts in the Prime Minister's Department are vacant.

Datuk Seri Idris Jala's senatorship ended in August last year, while the position of minister in charge of the Economic Planning Unit is also vacant following Datuk Seri Abdul Wahid Omar's decision not to extend his service at the end of his three-year term as senator.

A third post – that of Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister held by Datuk Seri Douglas Uggah Embas – is also vacant. The Betong MP is now a Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister in charge of non-Islamic affairs.

It is believed that Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak will likely appoint ano-



Job openings: Two positions in the Prime Minister's Department have been left vacant following the departure of Jala (left) and Abdul Wahid.

ther Sarawakian to take over the post. Two deputy minister posts are also vacant.

Deputy Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Noriah Kasnon died in a helicopter crash last month, while Domestic Trade, Consumerism and Co-operatives Minister Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin is also in need of a deputy after Datuk Seri Ahmad Bashah Md Hanipah became Kedah menteri besar in February.

Officials from the Prime Minister's Office are tight-lipped



while ministers contacted said the matter was never raised during Cabinet meetings.

"In the years that I have been a minister, reshuffles, the appointment of ministers or deputies were never brought up and we have never asked," said a senior minister.

However, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar said the Prime Minister had mentioned it recently.

"It was stated in passing by the Prime Minister," he said.

Dr Wan Junaidi said Najib might have discussed it with the Deputy Prime Minister and not necessarily with others.

"Since one of the vacant posts was last filled by a Sarawak minister, the Prime Minister might have also discussed it with the chief minister of Sarawak if the replacement is intended to be from the state," he said.

Some political observers say that the Prime Minister will only make new appointments rather than move around his ministers with only two years left before the next general election.

National Council of Professors political, security and international affairs council head Prof Datuk Wira Dr Mohamed Mustafa Ishak believes that a major reshuffle is unlikely and Najib will only fill the vacancies in his Cabinet.

"I don't see any reason why the Prime Minister would want to revamp his Cabinet, especially when only about two years remain for the current term.

"But he will have to fill the Cabinet positions to ensure a smooth administration," he said.