

Making sense of Najib's Cabinet
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By The Malaysian Insider

ANALYSIS, May 15 — It is apparent that Umno and East Malaysia were rewarded big time for Barisan Nasional's (BN) return to power in GE13.

What else can be deciphered from the choices made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak?

The Malaysian Insider offers some observations about this Cabinet.

* Datuk Seri Hishammudin Hussein.

He came within a cusp of retaining his Home Ministry portfolio, backed by strong support from the now discredited BN war room. But finally Najib realised that if he is going to convince Malaysians that he is serious about tackling crime, his cousin, infamous for inaction, cannot be in that important ministry.

But to prevent the Umno vice-president from being "kecil hati" he was given the defence portfolio and also made acting Transport Minister. Hard to imagine what he can achieve in both ministries, given his lacklustre track record as Education Minister in the Abdullah administration and Home Minister under Najib. Remember his performance in Lahad Datu when he dismissed the Sulu fighters as old men.

But giving him a junior ministry would have been too dangerous in an election year.

* Bye-bye MCA

Branches are being shut down and the party president wants to cling onto to his position despite growing calls for his resignation and now, not one MCA politician is in Cabinet.

Without any representation or a public profile, the party is on road to oblivion come GE14. No recount will be necessary then.

* Bumper for East Malaysia

If you believe conspiracy theorists (and in Malaysia, it is a cottage industry), Sabah and Sarawak politicians were ready to cross the political divide if they had not been amply rewarded with good positions as ministers and deputy ministers.

So hardly surprising that 13 BN politicians from East Malaysia were named as ministers by a government still coming to terms with its less than stellar performance in GE13.

* Is fighting crime a priority?

One of the major issues among urban voters in GE13 was the increase in crime and the perception that Pemandu and the police were fudging numbers and the Home Minister was overwhelmed by the whole situation.

Step in Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, the former defence minister, best known for trying

to pin the Sulu invasion/terrorism/criminal activity on the Opposition and sanctioning the purchase of military hardware at astronomical prices.

Now he is in charge of tackling crime. Go figure.

* Umno polls trumps everything else.

A well-balanced Cabinet. A mix of old and new. The simple fact is that the choice of Umno ministers was dictated by the upcoming party polls in November.

Given the failure of the BN government to regain its two-thirds majority in Parliament and the Tun Abdullah Badawi experience (where the Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin combo worked to force his resignation), it appears critical for Najib to secure support of party warlords in the event of challenge.

So for now, any talk of a reformist Cabinet can wait. Self-preservation is more important.

* Mahathir on the wane?

It is an open secret that pro-Mahathir bloggers have campaigned against Najib appointing Khairy Jamaluddin and his acolyte, Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan, as ministers, seeing them as proxies of Abdullah Badawi.

Quite a few threats were hurled at Najib but the PM did not buckle.

* No Selangor representatives

Najib has always been a traditionalist, giving a post to every Umno state chapter but this time around, Selangor Umno does not even have a minister in the Cabinet with Datuk Seri Noh Omar being dropped.

It shows how poorly Selangor Umno did in GE13 and reflects how hard it will be for the party to get back the country's wealthiest state.

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