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'New FT Minister must engage with the rakyat'

STAKEHOLDERS hope the appointment of Dr Zaliha Mustafa as Minister in charge of Federal Territories, under the Prime Minister's Department, in the Cabinet reshuffle will lead to better governance and accountability.

However, some questioned why an "outsider" had been appointed to oversee the Federal Territories.

Dr Zaliha, who was previously Health minister, is from Johor. Local Agenda 21 Brickfields chairman SKK Naidu said having a Federal Territories Minister was a good move.

"If Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) does not move efficiently and effectively, we can approach the minister to intervene and this will be helpful.

"But we do not understand why a person who is not from Kuala Lumpur, is appointed.

"We want someone who is born and bred in Kuala Lumpur as he or she would understand local issues better," he added.

Save Kuala Lumpur (SKL) chairman Datuk M. Ali said the coalition of over 30 residents associations had been advocating for the ministry and Federal Territories Minister's post to be abolished.

"It happened last year and a department was established under the Prime Minister's Department.

"It was functioning smoothly, in our opinion," he said, referring to the move by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to abolish the Federal Territories Ministry on Dec 22, 2022, under the newly formed unity government.

It was restructured as Federal Territories Department and parked under the Prime Minister's Department.

However, Ali said that now that Dr Zaliha had been appointed, "the people in Kuala Lumpur are left with no choice but to hope that there will be positive results".

"There must be total transpar-

Kuala Lumpur stakeholders hope appointment will be free of political interference



Stakeholders in KL hope the new minister will be more accountable to people in the city. — Filepic

ency and accountability.

"We look forward to the new minister interacting with the *rakyat* for the good of the city," he said, adding that they wished to know what her plans were for the short, mid and long-term.

Cheras MP Tan Kok Wai, when contacted, expressed surprise over Dr Zaliha's appointment, but said he was hopeful it would lead to beneficial changes.

"To be frank, we at Federal Territory DAP, which I lead, have consistently called for the dissolution of the ministry due to political meddling and to save taxpayers' money.

"Previously, there was significant political interference, with overlapping responsibilities

between the mayor and minister.

"We have seen this in the liquor licence ruling.

"We are optimistic that Dr Zaliha's appointment as the minister responsible for the three Federal Territories will usher in improved governance.

"However, we still aspire to see the reinstatement of local government elections for the positions of mayor and city councillors," Kok Wai added.

Kepong MP Lim Lip Eng extended his congratulations to Dr Zaliha, saying, "I am keen to meet her to establish a positive relationship and gain clear understanding of her new role.

"I hope that the MPs will transform the Federal Territories into

vibrant, safe and well-developed places in the foreseeable future," he said.

Kuala Lumpur Residents Action for Sustainable Development (KLRA+SD) chairman Tan Booi Charn told *StarMetro* that if the current minister was going to function like the previous ministers, "then we are against this".

"So we hope this new appointment will see institutional reform in the Federal Territories that are accountable to stakeholders and constituents," said Booi Charn.

The Federal Territories Ministry has had a chequered history.

It was first established in 1979,



Dr Zaliha is the new Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of Federal Territories.



Booi Charn hopes the new appointment will see institutional reform in the Federal Territories.

under the stewardship of the country's third prime minister, Tun Hussein Onn.

However, the post was dissolved in 1987.

In the early 2000s, the administration of the Federal Territories was assigned to Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor, within the purview of the Prime Minister's Department.

The Federal Territories Ministry was revived in 2004, with Tan Sri Mohamed Isa Abdul Samad at the helm.

Datuk Seri Dr Shahidan Kassim served as Federal Territories minister up until the 15th General Election.