Cabinet Reshuffle – The Highlights

Why in news?

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The PM has effected a reshuffle of his council of ministers.

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What are the major happenings?

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- The reshuffle has been perceived as a clear attempt to improve the capability quotient by bringing in new people with proven administrative experience.
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- **Bureaucrats -** Of the 9 new ministers of state, 4 were former bureaucrats and significantly three of them have been given independent charge of important ministries straightaway.
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- Two of them - Hardeep Singh Puri and Alphons Kannanthanam, are not even MPs.
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- Their mandate will be to single-mindedly focus on results without having to worry about nurturing a political constituency.
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- This is indicative of Mr Modi’s desire to address concerns over talent deficit in his party to fill in key portfolios.
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- **Age Criteria –** The dropping of Kalraj Mishra is an indication that PM Modi is serious about the below 75-years cuttoff.
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- **Benefit of Doubt -** Former railway minister Mr.Suresh Prabhu, who offered to resign in the wake of several rail accidents is now in charge of commerce and industry.
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- He has been given the benefit of doubt & it is hoped that he will bring a more positive approach to trade issues and will be able to use exports as a genuine engine for domestic growth.
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- **The Gainers -** The PM has also rewarded the performance of a few of his existing ministers by promoting them to Cabinet rank or by giving additional responsibilities.
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- The biggest surprise was the elevation of Ms.Nirmala Sitharaman as defence minister.
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- She now becomes part of the Cabinet Committee on Security, along with External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, making it the first time that two women are on the top decision-making body.
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- Ms.Sitharaman takes over at a time of complex challenges for the ministry, notably the border tensions & the awaited big ticket purchases.
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What are the criticisms?

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- It is hard to understand why the vacated portfolios were treated as adjuncts - Skill development has been clubbed with the ministry of petroleum and water resources with road transport and shipping.
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- Strangely, the coal ministry has been grouped with railways, but the mines portfolio has been packaged with the rural development ministry.
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- There was also a hint of some political compulsions in the reshuffle with a clear eye on the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.
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Source: Business line

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