

Key rejig in Modi Cabinet

The readjustment of portfolios in Monday's Cabinet rejig sports two significant changes, with Piyush Goyal taking charge of finance and Smriti Irani being stripped of the information and broadcasting ministry. The promotion and demotion of the two ministers may be in sharp contrast, but both represent grey areas in governance and about how they have conducted themselves in office. Mr Goyal's elevation may not be all that important as continuity of work, while Arun Jaitley recovers from a kidney transplant, may still lie with finance secretary Hasmukh Adhia. But the optics seems bad in a major portfolio as Mr Goyal was a minister of state till not long ago. Also, he invited attention by speaking in defence of BJP president Amit Shah's son's business ventures that were hit by an expose.

Ms Irani's downgrading, to handle only textiles, is in keeping with her dubious formbook, where she has been seen as controversial in any portfolio given to her. Her handling of the human resources development ministry led to heartaches in the education sector. She rubbed nuclear scientists and former IIT-Mumbai director Anil Kakodkar the wrong way with claims he had tried to promote a candidate for IIT directorship. In a second high-profile ministry, she got embroiled in a row involving the President of India and the national film awards, that left many of the awardees dissatisfied and fuming. Her hamhanded attempt to rein in the media by devising guidelines on how it should conduct itself came a cropper as the government beat a hasty retreat. These are not ministers who have in any way boosted the image of the Narendra Modi government.