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New Cabinet team must be able to steer BN safely into next century

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THE new Cabinet line-up now being formulated is being eagerly awaited in the face of post-election analyses of the shock defeats and narrow victories scored by some Barisan Nasional candidates.

Some indicators are available to afford a glimpse of what the line-up may look like. The first is the likelihood of no fewer than 15 new faces to fill in the Cabinet Minister's and deputy ministerial positions.

This is due to the defeat of four Cabinet Ministers and five Deputy Ministers, the promotion of two Ministers to the position of Menteri Besar and Chief Minister in Perak and Malacca, and those who did not contest.

With these vacancies to be filled in the next few days, the make-up of the new Cabinet will have to take into account the delicate balance between a candidate's popularity and his or her capability.

While the election results were the expressed opinion of the people who used the vote to measure and decide on the value of each candidate, it may have not been an accurate reflection of some of the candidate's capabilities in some instances.

Mustapa Mohamed is a case in point. Many feel bad about his defeat as he was seen to be an example of the new breed of clean and efficient political leaders which BN needs.

An Utusan Malaysia editorial slammed Jeli voters for their rejection of Mustapa, who had in the last four years brought numerous changes and developments to the constituency, apart from his excellent record as Entrepreneur Development Minister and Second Finance Minister.

Nonetheless, some candidates may have themselves to blame for their defeat.

Political observers say this could be the case for Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, one of Umno's top religious scholars, who ironically lost the Sik parliamentary seat to Shahnnon Ahmad, a sasterawan whose main political credit is authoring a book called Shit.

Abdul Hamid's failure to prevent political parties from taking over mosques has been cited as one reason for his defeat.

Whatever the case, as we wait for the Cabinet to be formed, we also hope that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will also give room to younger individuals who have shown promise.

Among the rising stars widely tipped for promotion to Cabinet positions are acting Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Mohamad Nazri Abdul Aziz and MCA vice-president Datuk Ong Ka Ting.

However, in wanting to invigorate the Cabinet and component parties with young blood, BN should realise that youthfulness must not be the only consideration.

Among the younger set tipped for promotion are those whose past activities may present a liability in the future. As such, it would not do well for the Government to select such individuals.

In any case, the BN should be commended for nominating many new and younger faces. Apart from the likely inclusion of senior stalwarts like former Perak Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib, former Perlis Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Pawanteh and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah in the Cabinet, new faces are also set to feature prominently.

Among those predicted to become Deputy Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries are three-term Parit Sulong Member of Parliament Datuk Ruhanie

Ahmad, Tan Sri Dr K.S. Nijhar (Subang) and Datuk Dr Mahadzir Mohd Khir (Sungai Petani).

It would also be pragmatic for BN to include more women in the line-up.

For their ability as women to heal, to soften the hard edge of politics, to negotiate as they often do in less obtrusive ways, it may be balm to have a few more women in Cabinet and Deputy Minister's positions.

Predictions include the nomination of Lembah Pantai Parliamentary Secretary to the Youth and Sports Ministry, Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Datuk Napsiah Omar (Pilah State Assemblywoman) and Muar MP Dr Robia Datuk Kosai.

However, those selected must be able to work as a team. The position of women incumbents who have performed poorly in these areas should be reviewed.

In the end, apart from the usual political considerations like State and component party quotas, Dr Mahathir now has his hands full.

Not only will he have to decide on the best line-up to represent the new arrangements brought about by the results of last Monday's polls, Dr Mahathir will also need Cabinet team members who will take the BN securely into the next century.

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