

PM expected to downsize cabinet
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is expected to unveil a slimline new cabinet early next week, cutting back posts after unprecedented election losses. MCPX

The Star daily cited sources as saying that posts would be trimmed in line with the smaller government presence in parliament, where it now has 140 lawmakers compared to 198 in the outgoing administration.

Abdullah told the state Bernama news agency the new line-up would reflect the coalition's racial power-sharing concept and would include all the communities - majority Muslim Malays and minority ethnic Chinese and Indians.

"Wait a few more days," he said late yesterday, when asked when the cabinet would be unveiled.

The ruling Barisan Nasional coalition lost its two-thirds majority for the first time in four decades, and conceded four more states to a resurgent opposition in March 8 polls.

Abdullah to face headache

Abdullah's previous cabinet had a whopping 32 ministers, 39 deputy ministers and 20 parliamentary secretaries, with jobs handed out to many of the 14 race-based parties that make up the Barisan Nasional.

The large cabinet had been criticised as unwieldy and wasteful, but The Star said Abdullah faced a headache in reducing positions while still keeping the coalition members happy. It said some ministries could be merged.

Political observers have also said that Abdullah will have difficulties finding ethnic minority candidates to fill prominent posts, after the Chinese and Indian parties in the coalition were punished in the elections.

The only Indian cabinet minister in the outgoing administration, S Samy Vellu, lost his parliamentary seat which he had held since 1974.

The minority parties in the coalition bore the brunt of voter anger over rising "Islamisation" of Malaysia and criticisms the government was insensitive to the needs of minorities.