



Choosing the Best

Due to our power-sharing concept, many ministers in this country are appointed because they happen to hold important party posts. Perhaps the time has come to review this practice.

HOW MANY of the current ministers deserve to sit on the Cabinet? This question must have been on our minds when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi reshuffled his Cabinet recently.

It is never an easy task for any Prime Minister to come up with the perfect Cabinet. More so in a country like Malaysia, with its uniqueness of race, culture, religion and politics.

Abdullah has numerous factors to consider. He has to ensure that the interests of the various states, political component parties, gender and even party posts have to be taken into consideration and be represented in his team. It is a very fine balancing act indeed.

Which also probably explains why for a nation of our size, we have to accommodate a disproportionately large Cabinet of 32 ministers and even more deputy ministers and parliamentary secretaries. Japan, with a population of over a 100 million, has a Cabinet size of less than 20.

The Prime Minister must have given careful thought before making his choice and we have to accept that it is his prerogative to have who he wants in his team. Inevitably, not everyone will be happy.

Take this latest reshuffle — politicians from Selangor complained that they had no representative except for Datuk Aziz Shamsuddin, a Perakian, while Sarawakians lamented that they had one less Cabinet Minister. Others were envious that Johor had more than its fair share of ministers, while PPP members were disappointed that their president remained the only component party head in the Barisan Nasional (BN) without a Cabinet position.

So, the pertinent question here is: Should Cabinet Ministers be appointed based on their political representation or their ability?

Is it imperative that the leader of a BN component party, for example, be automatically appointed a minister

or deputy minister? Unfortunately, that seems to be the case now, given the political power-sharing concept.

Many are appointed ministers just because they hold important party posts. But what happens if they do not live up to expectations as ministers? Must we continue to tolerate them?

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In fact, in many countries, the chief of a political party does not necessarily hold a Cabinet post. The party may nominate its representative to the Cabinet based on qualifications and competency.

You might be a good politician but that does not necessarily make you a good minister. We have seen countless cases where ministers have bungled in their duties but the Prime Minister is hard-pressed not to drop them simply because of their political representations. Some have been ministers for so long that they are running out of ideas and have become jaded in their thinking.

Let us not forget that the Prime Minister has a job to do. The people have given him that mandate - a big one. He needs the best team to help him propel the nation forward.

He must not be bogged down by narrow-minded politicians with vested interests, or party heads who put their self-interest ahead of everything else.

The country needs ministers who have integrity, are highly competent and well-versed in matters relating to their ministry.

No doubt, Malaysia has a unique power-sharing concept. Some will argue that it has served us well, but that does not mean we cannot fine-tune and improve the way we do things. mb