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Give science a bigger role

The Star, Malaysia



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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has a daunting task in picking and choosing his Cabinet members. While governance and integrity were the main concerns in the past, this time focus must also be placed on the need to propel the country to developed nation status.

Malaysians are eagerly waiting for transformation of the health-care and education systems, and improvements in food security, transport, housing, environment (read waste management, conservation and climate change) as well as the water and energy sectors, not to mention women and youth empowerment.

All these developments are tied to international goals like the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), crises preparedness and food security.

It cannot be denied that most of these goals can be achieved with science, technology and innovation (STI). As such, the Science, Technology and Innovation

Ministry (Mosti) must be transformed into a key ministry.

At this juncture, I must congratulate the former ministers, Datuk Seri Adham Baba and Khairy Jamaluddin, for their efforts in rebuilding the ministry. Both ministers took a keen interest and in a holistic manner by not neglecting any STI sectors, which encompass a wide array of specialised areas. Many policies that had been previously sidelined were revived, including MySTIE and the National Biotechnology Policy 2.0. The ministry also responded quickly to the Covid-19 pandemic by developing the National Vaccine Development Roadmap.

With due respect, I would like to request that our Prime Minister and his unity government choose the minister for Mosti carefully. The person who is chosen must be able to rebrand and transform the ministry into a key organ for nation-building.

I trust that the scientific community is not expecting a minister

who is trained in science or has a PhD in the sciences. Being part of the science community for the last two decades, I can read the sentiments and dare say the expectation is for a minister who respects Malaysian experts, professors and academia.

Choose someone who is willing to engage with and listen to the science fraternity. Malaysia is not short of internationally recognised and renowned experts.

The science community in the country must be represented by highly intellectual policymakers or politicians. We expect someone who can work and learn with us, and can give due respect to scientists and academics.

The minister should not come with personal ideologies favouring one sector over the other. We do not want any sectors to be sidelined. Science is becoming multidisciplinary, so no field can stand alone.

As someone who is engaged internationally, I am sad to see

Malaysia losing out in science even to our Asean neighbours, what more the OECD countries. With science advancing so rapidly, it is becoming more difficult for us to catch up.

In fact, for every one step we take, others are moving forward in leaps and bounds.

There is no need to revive MESTECC (Ministry of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment, and Climate Change) because this is an extremely broad area to manage. To keep the Cabinet lean, Mosti could be merged with Higher Education where research funds and talent development in STEM can be streamlined.

I take this opportunity to congratulate our 10th Prime Minister and I am looking forward to working closely with his government.

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SUMMARIES

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