

**Homework**

Nominated RS members offer excellent route for bringing in outside talent & appointing them as Cabinet members

# Lateral Entry into Ministry? An Idea That Only PM Can Execute



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Much has been talked about lateral entry for bureaucracy, with the government planning to implement the proposal. But what about lateral entry for Cabinet ministers?

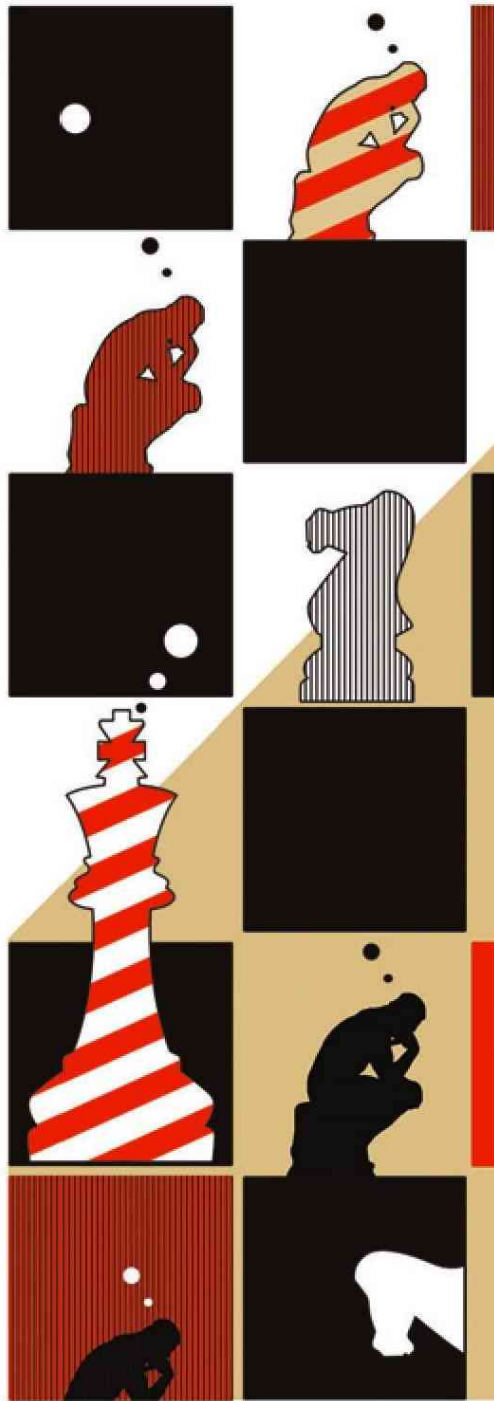
True, this goes against one of the strongest principles of a democratic parliamentary system — MPs of the ruling party become Cabinet ministers, rank outsiders to the political system don't. But think about it — lateral entry as Cabinet ministers for those not in active politics has already happened. Manmohan Singh is the best example. He was an ex-administrator with no history of active political participation when he was picked as finance minister by Narasimha Rao. And Singh then shepherded economic reforms.

True, the context of that appointment was that India faced an economic crisis. But lateral entries in Cabinet needn't only be crisis mode options. It is also true that in a crisis-free atmosphere, such as now, only a PM with tremendous authority and personal political appeal can execute such a radical policy change. The good thing is in Narendra Modi, India has such a PM — he has the stature and the heft to change a long-standing convention.

The PM has already shown he has the courage of conviction for implementing big, bold ideas; demonetisation is a good example. So, is the big change is assessing bureaucrats. Or for that matter, the surgical strike in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.

Of course, Cabinet ministers need to be MPs, either of the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha. Outside talent usually make for political unsuitable candidates for Lok Sabha. Regular Rajya Sabha seats are in high demand as they are used to bring in political heavyweights who don't, for whatever reason, make the Lok Sabha route.

But nominated Rajya Sabha members — there are 12 such MPs — offer an excellent route for bringing in outside talent and appointing them as Cabinet members. This op-



## PM SETS TONE

 In India's political system, it is the prime minister that sets the government's tone

tion doesn't reduce Rajya Sabha seats for political heavyweights, doesn't upset party calculations but inducts good talent in the government. Retired top bureaucrats will tell you that in India's political system, it is the PM that sets the government's tone, he's the all powerful CEO and he needs a strong team of senior executives.

Given this, a performance-driven PM like Modi will have many more options for Cabinet appointments were this route to be explored. It is not that politicians don't make good Cabinet ministers. They do, and there are good examples in this government, too. But as governance becomes more complicated, as India's economy grows, as its ambitions become bigger, the talent pool for choosing Cabinet ministers should become bigger, too.

In America's presidential form of government, outside talent with active political experience are regularly appointed in Cabinet positions. True, America's system doesn't need a Cabinet member to be a part of the legislature, whereas India's does. But the nominated Rajya Sabha member route gives the flexibility to Indian prime ministers.

For politicians appointed as ministers, as a senior minister had once told this correspondent, this government seems to want to avoid putting those with direct experience in a field in charge of a ministry related to that field — *khel mein khiladi nahin, Suraksha mein sipahi nahin*, the minister had observed.


Rajyavardhan Rathore is not in charge of sports and VK Singh was never given defence. There's a political logic to this — avoid any possible conflicts of interest.

But outside talents with proven track record in one field and demonstrable integrity can be given cabinet responsibilities in that field. The time has come to give this idea serious thought.

## PM NEEDS STRONG TEAM

 Prime minister is all powerful CEO and he needs a strong team of senior executives

## NEED BIGGER TALENT POOL

 As economy grows, talent pool for choosing Cabinet ministers should become bigger

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