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Trimming the cabinet

The challenge for cabinetmaker President Cyril Ramaphosa is design. Reducing cabinet bulk entails forced marriages, marriages of convenience and mergers.

A list might see home affairs joined with safety & security; the department of trade, industry & competition with tourism and minerals; basic education with higher education and labour; health with social development; water with energy; environment with climate change; built environment a combination of public works, infrastructure and housing; communication with innovation and digitisation. This pares the cabinet by, say, 10 posts.

So far, so tough. Ministers must prioritise and act, working with those in post. No, dear Centre for Development & Enterprise, a purge is out ("The right people in top public sector jobs can boost growth", June 25). "Give me your single most burning priority" is the imperative, and this means working with companies, labour unions and civil society.

How about halving the cost of broadband? A master's office that works? Improve education by requiring all trainers to have recent, relevant experience at the level they train for? Polygraph the top layers of the public service? Modulate sectoral wage agreements by firm size?

Twenty (or more) ministries, with one key priority, objectives and indicators, generates an enormous amount of data. And, for the record, we have successes — Natis, Sars/Accenture tax e-filing and the home affairs-big banks passport issuing system.

Looking forward, new ICT systems may be purchased through smart procurement to support home affairs (visas), justice (dockets), minerals (spatial data) and so on. But a cautionary note — world expert Bent Flyvbjerg shows that 90% of large projects incur cost and time overruns with output failure. With care, large AI-powered ICT systems might be operational two years from now. That would be a stunning achievement.

We have a golden moment to address shortcomings at all levels of government with the shift from one-party rule to GNU 2 — centrist on monetary and economic policy, to the left on



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social policy, all in a framework of
consociationalism.

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