

Don't let usual suspects decide on next IMF boss

Financial Times | Published: May 26 2011 02:36 | Last updated: May 26 2011 02:36

Financial Times

From Prof Jagdish Bhagwati.

Sir, The choice of a successor to [Dominique Strauss-Kahn](#) has elicited predictable comments, especially that the succession be on merit and should not exclude non-European candidates (Letters, May 24 and 25). But more can be said.

In particular, the practice of the World Trade Organisation in choosing the director-general provides a role model. The WTO has seen the election of Dr Supachai Panitchpakdi of Thailand to the job in a closely matched contest with Michael Moore of New Zealand, leading to a split term for each. And the Frenchman Pascal Lamy, the current DG, had to fight a tough battle with the Brazilian candidate to get the job.

Contrast this with the way the American Robert Zoellick walked into the World Bank job when Paul Wolfowitz resigned, the US virtually nominating him.

But the current slate of candidates being discussed for the IMF job raises an issue that afflicts both the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO. In all cases, the slate of candidates being discussed is typically confined to politicians, often ministers and even prime ministers, and high-level bureaucrats. Yet, there is no reason to exclude distinguished academics from competition for these jobs. For example, the UNHCR was led with distinction by Sadako Ogata who had long been an academic.

Perhaps the way to widen the slate is to cut the link between nominations for the job and the governments: it is inevitable that governments, which means of course bureaucrats and politicians, will nominate their own kind to these jobs.

Jagdish Bhagwati,

University Professor of Economics and Law,

Columbia University,

New York, NY, US