

COMMENT | Tenuous numbers prop Anwar's bid to be PM

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COMMENT | In the despair of the Covid-19 pandemic, the country braces itself for another political/constitutional predicament, thanks to opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's proclamation that he has the numbers to launch a coup to become prime minister.

Anwar has claimed a supermajority among the 222 Members of Parliament in the Dewan Rakyat that entitles him to stake a claim for the premiership, a position he has coveted for almost three decades.

On the surface, it seems so persuasive that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong granted Anwar an audience on Tuesday (tomorrow, Oct 13).

In that audience, Anwar must prove to the King that he has the majority of the MPs' support to oust Muhyiddin Yassin and get himself installed as the next prime minister.

However, here is the rub: even if Anwar can convince the King that he commands a supermajority, the King simply cannot accede to Anwar's claim.

Here is why: the Malaysian Constitution does not provide for the King to remove a sitting prime minister.

Only the Dewan Rakyat has the power, via a motion of no confidence, or by not passing an important bill like the annual budget, which is expected to be tabled next month.

If the motion of no confidence is approved, then the sitting prime minister must resign.

The King then has the prerogative to appoint an MP, who, in the monarch's absolute discretion, can command majority support in the Dewan Rakyat.

Alternatively, provided that the outgoing prime minister advises the King to dissolve Parliament, the King has the prerogative to dissolve (or not to dissolve) the Dewan Rakyat.

If the King decides on a dissolution, then an election must be held within 60 days.

However, the King has the power, under Article 55 of the Constitution, to call for a special session of the Dewan Rakyat to be convened to decide if the sitting prime minister still has the support of a simple majority.

Here is another rub: Anwar seems to be putting the cart before the horse.

Anwar must first prove that Muhyiddin has lost the confidence of a majority of at least 112 MPs.

Anwar's first proper approach is to convince the King that Muhyiddin simply does not command a majority in the Dewan Rakyat.

To demonstrate this scenario, Anwar will appeal to the King to convene a special Dewan Rakyat session as soon as possible or wait until the next session on Nov 2 to "creatively" convince or compel the Speaker to allow for a vote of no confidence, as a matter of priority, against Muhyiddin.

Let's now look at the numbers game, based on various reports and speculations.

For the sake of argument, assume that Muhyiddin does not command the majority support anymore and examine Anwar's claim of a simple or supermajority.

Assuming Anwar has the full backing of Pakatan Harapan MPs – DAP (42), PKR (38), and Amanah (11), he only commands 91 MPs. It is inadequate.

Only Amanah has publicly stated that they would support Anwar for the premiership.

Intriguingly, Anwar's basis for his proclamation is that he has somehow secured major support of 10 to 15 from Umno's 39 MPs.

Reports link these Umno MPs to former party president Najib Abdul Razak and current president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

However, several Umno MPs in Anwar's purported list have denied support for the pretender.

At least two Umno MPs lodged police reports to complain about their inclusion in Anwar's purported list.

Based on DAP leaders' press statements, they seemed to be saying that Anwar will get DAP's backing – if he can prove that he commands a simple Dewan Rakyat majority – without the 42 DAP MPs' backing.

It is a cliché, but it is a chicken and egg situation for Anwar. DAP has made it clear that they do not wish to associate themselves with the Umno leaders linked to Anwar's coup.

Separately, PAS made it abundantly clear that none of its 18 MPs backs Anwar.

Leaders of GPS, with 18 MPs, have openly stated that they do not support Anwar and continue aligning to Muhyiddin.

Nevertheless, it is possible that a small number of Bersatu MPs might have made a deal with Anwar.

Warisan's nine MPs and the five under Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Pejuang are not expected to back Anwar, whom they consider a nemesis.

Even with the existing 38 PKR MPs, some authoritative political blogs speculated that at least 15 MPs have rejected Anwar and are waiting to jump ship at the right time.

A crucial note with Anwar is that many MPs of other parties have no quarrel with PKR, only with their controversial president.

Unless there is a well-hidden political conspiracy bubbling or Anwar is somehow a “political magician”, it does not take a rocket scientist to infer that Anwar has a “mission impossible” at this moment of getting 112 MPs in his infinite quest to be the next prime minister.

In any case, good luck to Anwar anyway, on his rendezvous with the King.

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