

## **LETTER | Challenges confronting the new PM**

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**KK Tan**

LETTER | The die has been cast. The Yang di-Pertuan Agong, after consulting his brother rulers, has agreed to appoint former deputy prime minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob as the ninth prime minister with a swearing-in ceremony today.

Whether we like it or not, we must accept and respect the decision made by the king, who is strictly following Constitutional protocol that the Bera MP has secured the support of a simple majority, based on statutory declarations (SDs) of 114 MPs, which is three more than the minimum of 111 MPs needed.

A thin majority is still a majority and the king has no choice but to appoint Ismail Sabri as the new prime minister based on our system of constitutional monarchy.

The earlier doubt and question raised that the leaders of Perikatan Nasional (PN, of mainly Bersatu and PAS) with 50 MPs and Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) with 18 MPs only gave conditional support to Ismail Sabri, was over-ruled by the fact

that the SDs of their MPs (apparently) did not state any such conditions.

Therefore, the conditions stated in the press by these leaders of PN and GPS were not reflected in the SDs, which are far more official and valid than the purported press statements with the conditions stated.

To the critics and detractors of the new prime minister, I would like to ask them to be fair, respect the decision of the king based on parliamentary democracy and give him a chance to prove himself, even though he was a senior minister and deputy prime minister in the previous administration, which seemed to have failed in managing the pandemic.

Please give him a chance, as the “buck stops with him now” and he has to assume full responsibility for the outcome of his new government.

To Ismail Sabri’s supporters, I would like to ask them to temper their joy and celebrations on their success and to focus on helping him to overcome and deal with the many challenges confronting him and the country today.

As a seasoned and independent analyst, I would like to look at the big picture on the challenges confronting Ismail Sabri and how he may survive this tumultuous period in our country’s history.

The three-fold external challenges that the new prime minister has to deal with are as follows:

- To manage well and bring to an end this terrible and devastating pandemic and turn the economy around.
- To manage the high expectations of an increasingly frustrated and impatient general public, partly due to the failures of the previous administration.
- To deal with a more united opposition of at least 105 MPs, who would be expected to closely monitor and scrutinise, hopefully in a constructive manner, all the major policies, decisions and actions of the new government.

On whether he would be able to forge some kind of a “unity government” (as advised by the king and the rulers) by bringing in some key opposition leaders to the government as ministers, we would have to wait and see. This would pose another challenge for the new prime minister if it happens.

The internal challenges for Ismail are even more daunting, due to his slim majority in Parliament and any missteps can be “fatal” to his position, as it can be

seen for his predecessor.

These challenges are basically two-fold:

- Managing the possible infighting and rivalries within his own party Umno and how he would be able to rein in those (especially MPs) who may not be so loyal to him
- Dealing with PN, especially Bersatu, which is being forced to play second fiddle now and which is expected to try to “control” the new government. The signs are already out by the warning or threat that the PN chairperson Muhyiddin Yassin, who has just given on some dos and don'ts by the new PM and government. Also, the former PM (and Bersatu) would not so easily forget or forgive the 15 MPs of Ismail Sabri's own party (Umno) for being responsible for bringing him down recently.

This tussle for power control and influence between Umno and Bersatu would be one of the most difficult tasks for the new PM to manage. It would be hard to please all sides and the new PM can often get himself caught in a no-win situation.

The appointment of senior or important ministers would be his first test of how

he can juggle his way through to keep everyone happy.

The vote of confidence in Parliament (which could now be an ongoing challenge) to confirm his majority support, would also be another hurdle for him.

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