

Sources: PM wants representative cabinet, has limited options

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Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has indicated to allies that he intends to form a cabinet that represents the “faces of Malaysia” but is facing limited options due to the realities of his government.

This comes amid intense BN lobbying for its chairperson Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who is facing a corruption trial, to be appointed deputy prime minister.

Anwar indicated his challenges in forming a cabinet when he chaired the Pakatan Harapan presidential council on Monday.

According to Amanah deputy president Salahuddin Ayub, the council did not discuss the specifics of Anwar’s cabinet.

He said this when asked if any Harapan leaders made demands for cabinet positions or whether there were any objections to Zahid’s possible appointment.

“We did not discuss the new cabinet. Anwar opened the meeting by briefing us on what he had done so far,” said Salahuddin, who attended the meeting held at the PKR headquarters in Selangor.

He said cabinet appointments are purely the prime minister’s prerogative and he expected an announcement tomorrow.

“None of us (Harapan) leaders has a clue but I think that’s common for any PM.

“It was the same when Tun (Dr Mahathir Mohamad) formed his cabinet,” said Salahuddin.

Harapan component parties, he said, are only able to nominate ministerial candidates and not demand specific positions.

Need to accommodate

A source close to the Harapan leadership said the meeting mostly revolved around housekeeping matters but Anwar did express concern over the “limited options” he had in controlling nominations by partner coalitions.

“Umno has its own ways and Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) have theirs. So,

Harapan has to be 'super duper' accommodative," said the source, when asked about Harapan's stance towards Zahid's inclusion in the cabinet.

"There are issues that need to be managed in the run-up to the Dewan Rakyat sitting on Dec 19."

Although Anwar claims to have the support of 148 MPs - more than two-thirds of the Dewan Rakyat - this will only be tested on Dec 19 when the Dewan Rakyat convenes and conducts a confidence vote.

A second PKR source, however, said Anwar's main concern revolves around how his smaller cabinet can reflect "the faces of Malaysia" while remaining effective and efficient.

"He (Anwar) specifically mentioned the need for representation from minorities, Sabah, Sarawak, and women.

"The cabinet must be representative of all Malaysians. That was very clear and we all accepted that," said the source.

The source confirmed that Zahid's candidacy for the cabinet was not discussed but added it was an "open secret" that Harapan is expected to respect any

candidates nominated by other partner coalitions.

Speculation surrounding Zahid's appointment as well as other MPs with pending corruption charges - including from within Harapan - has intensified in the days following Anwar's appointment as prime minister.

While civil society groups have argued that Zahid's appointment would hurt Anwar's credentials as a reformist, analysts noted that the prime minister will have to make concessions to keep the government intact.

Following the Nov 19 election, Zahid played a pivotal role in ensuring BN's 30 MPs backed the government sought by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. GPS only came on board after.

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