

Tuanku Mizan wants MPs to work for national good
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King Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin told lawmakers to ensure racial divisions do not undo swift economic progress as he officially opened the first parliament session since landmark general elections in March.
MCPX

He told MPs to maintain racial harmony, with ethnic tensions, alarm over 'Islamisation' and alienation of the country's minorities reflected in the ruling coalition government's worst ever results in the March 8 polls.

The king said the country's economic success was due to its "political stability and racial harmony."

"With this I urge all parties to bear the responsibility to ensure that all races are united and combat any attempts to split the people," he said.

Religious and racial issues are extremely sensitive in multi-ethnic Malaysia, which experienced deadly race riots in 1969.

The king also urged lawmakers to work for the national good and not get bogged down in party politics.

12th malaysia parliament official king opening 290408 03"I hope the elected representatives will carry out their tasks with dedication, sincerity and honesty," Tuanku Mizan said in a speech.

"The honourable MPs must place national interest above all and not to use this parliament to serve one's own political interest," he added.

The new parliament looks markedly different after the March 8 elections, with the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition still holding a majority but no longer enjoying two-thirds of seats required to make constitutional changes.

It will likely mean the already underfire government is set for a series of fiery challenges in the new parliament from a resurgent and emboldened opposition unofficially led by former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim.

The BN coalition has ruled Malaysia for more than half a century since the former colony gained independence from Britain in 1957, but the March results were its worst poll showing in 39 years.

Continue fighting graft

The king said the government must continue with plans to fight corruption and adopt measures that will promote transparency and accountability.

"The economic growth which has been enjoyed all the while will not be meaningful if corruption and abuse of power continues to happen," he said.

The government has been hit by numerous scandals in recent years with a minister, judges and several politicians facing corruption charges.

Anwar unleashed a furore last year by releasing a video clip apparently showing a lawyer telling a judge over the phone that he would put him forward for a top job.

On the economic front, the king urged more infrastructure development projects to ensure stable growth.

"I hope a steady growth can be maintained," he said.

A large number of opposition politicians, made up of bloggers and social activists, were sworn in to the parliament Monday after the landmark polls, with a total of 82 opposition MPs among the 222 members of parliament.

The disastrous March showing has led to calls from within his own Umno party for Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to step down.

No turning back for Anwar

12th malaysia parliament official king opening 290408 02Anwar, who is enjoying something of a political comeback, told reporters in Parliament that "there is no turning back" in his political life.

"It has began. It is a new beginning. Now that I am here, there is no turning back," he said.

Anwar last week confidently predicted he would be prime minister within three years, sketching out the first rough timetable for his dramatic political comeback.

Anwar, heir-apparent to long-time former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad before being sacked and jailed a decade ago, earlier this month became free to run for office again when a five-year ban stemming from his corruption conviction expired.

He has claimed he has the support of enough defectors to topple the government, heaping more pressure on Abdullah.

The new parliament session is also significant because it is the first time the official opposition leader is a woman - Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, head of PKR, and Anwar's wife.

"I have big shoes to fill, but I have been entrusted with this position and I will do my best. So, give me a chance," a beaming Wan Azizah told AFP.

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