

Pakatan cabinet: What will it look like?
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analysis In yesterday's analysis, we discussed the need for Pakatan Rakyat to form a shadow cabinet and we argued that the shadow cabinet portfolios should be allocated liberally amongst the three component parties.

Today, we present what a future Pakatan cabinet could look like. Such a discussion would not even be worth having prior to the elections but today, the notion of a Pakatan government is no longer a pipe dream.

anwar tour perak 050308 anwar sg siputWe believe that PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim would go out of his way to break from the past and structure his cabinet in a starkly different way from the Barisan Nasional. In fact, we think he will do so in three significant ways.

Firstly, the creation of at least two deputy prime minister positions. It goes without saying that a Pakatan government would have Anwar as the prime minister. Given that in Penang, the Pakatan state government has two deputy chief ministers and that there would have also been two deputy menteris besar in Perak and Selangor if not for royal intervention, we believe Anwar would have two DPMs.

In such a scenario, one of the DPMs would be from DAP and the other from PAS (Lim Kit Siang and Hadi Awang respectively). Anwar would also make it clear that in the event that he become incapacitated, the prime minister's position would be filled by another MP from PKR and not from DAP or PAS.

The politically correct reason for this is that the PM should come from the biggest component party, and in the Pakatan, that would be PKR. The realpolitik reason is to assuage fear amongst Malays and non-Malays that DAP's Lim Kit Siang and PAS' Abdul Hadi Awang respectively, might actually become the PM.

We also cannot discount the possibility that a DPM might come from East Malaysia. That would inflate the number of DPMs to three, which seems ridiculous but if a party can have three vice-presidents, why can't a government have three DPMs?

Secondly, there will also be more non-Malay cabinet members than ever before. Given that PKR does not dominate Parliament in the same ways as Umno currently does, it would have to allocate more cabinet positions to its coalition partners.

There is no question that DAP (which has almost as many seats as PKR) would have more cabinet positions than MCA, Gerakan and MIC combined. Also one must bear in mind that PKR, being a multiracial party, would likely nominate at least one Chinese and one Indian as cabinet ministers from within its own ranks.

It would not be surprising to see two Indian cabinet ministers in a Pakatan-led government, one from the DAP and one from PKR. It would also not be surprising to see the allocation of ministerial positions for Sabah and Sarawak to increase from the five under the current BN government.

Thirdly, Anwar will probably allocate at least one significant ministry to a non-Malay MP to clearly illustrate that Pakatan is not the opposition version of the BN. One could easily envision him having two finance ministers, one of them being non-Malay. Or perhaps he could appoint a non-Malay to head Miti (Ministry of International Trade and Industry).

More inclusive cabinet

In introducing a more inclusive cabinet, including naming more than one DPM, Anwar will be able to show the country and the world that he is truly the renaissance man that he has always aspired to be.

In doing this, he will inevitably be accused of forsaking the interest of the Malays by having more non-Malays in his cabinet than the BN ever did. He can ward off such criticisms by having an aggressive legislative agenda that demonstrates clearly that he can bring about positive changes that are beneficial to all Malaysians, regardless of race.

The component parties can play a big role in helping him. DAP can be expected to go out of its way to avoid being seen as advocating any policies that can be (rightly or wrongly) interpreted as being anti-Malay or anti-Islam. Meanwhile, PAS will have to pro-actively assure the Malays that their interests are indeed well-taken care of by a Pakatan government, even if there are more non-Malays in the cabinet.

There could be other stumbling blocks. The royalty might intervene if it doesn't like the composition of Anwar's cabinet. DAP and PAS might bicker over cabinet allocations. There could be discontent within his own party over the number of cabinet posts given to BN crossovers.

One thing is for certain though, a Pakatan cabinet would look nothing like a BN cabinet. Anwar will make sure of it.

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