

PKR leader begins uncertain journey to Putrajaya
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Condemned to political oblivion, former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim has completed a spectacular comeback to politics just short of the 10th anniversary of his expulsion from the cabinet and Umno.
MCPX

He will soon be appointed opposition leader, taking the seat right opposite Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and leading the Opposition in the budget debate, home ground for the former finance minister.

anwar ibrahim exclusive pre permatang pauh interview 130808 02Nevertheless, leading the Opposition is hardly Anwar's objective. Anwar has declared – and repeated in recent weeks – that he will have the numbers to form government by September 16th. With 81 in Pakatan Rakyat and one independent, 30 'converts' are needed to reach the magic number of 112, a clean majority of the 222 members of parliament.

Once the majority is achieved, politicians wanting to stay on the governing side will create a second wave of defections, expected to take Pakatan up to a comfortable majority

Most are skeptical that Anwar has the numbers. Within the BN, only the Sabah Progressive Party - with two parliamentarians - has come out publicly in support of a motion of no-confidence against the current prime minister. Nevertheless, rumours abound on how Pakatan will get the breakthrough.

One such strategy is that, rather than rely on individual parliamentarians, Anwar will seek to break the Barisan National coalition, and bring whole parties into Pakatan. With junior coalition partners feeling the strain of Umno hegemony, the timing may be right for defection.

The first cracks may occur if Pakatan is able to get just three parliamentarians in Peninsula Malaysia to defect. With a simple majority of 83 out of 165 MPs in the peninsular, Pakatan will then be able to occupy the political high ground and call on political parties of Sabah and Sarawak to work with the majority coalition of the peninsular.

The east Malaysian parties may well be able to justify a withdrawal from the BN and a new tactical alliance with Pakatan. This will push Pakatan well beyond the 112 members of parliament to form government.

Another scenario involves Umno losing its dominance within the BN. If nine out of 79 Umno parliamentarians cross over, Umno will be a minority within the coalition and will have difficulty holding on to the reins of power.

BN will not go quietly

If Anwar succeeds in putting the numbers together and pushing through a no-confidence motion against Abdullah, it remains to be seen how the Yang-diPertuan Agong will exercise his power in appointing a new prime minister.

Under Article 40 and 43 of the Federal Constitution, the Yang-diPertuan Agong is at liberty to appoint a new prime minister "who in his judgement, is likely to command the confidence of the majority". Hence selecting the opposition leader is not necessarily an automatic decision.

najib at bn leaders mca function in permatang pauh 250808 01The king could instead appoint the current deputy prime minister Najib Razak, if he believes that Najib can command a majority in Parliament. The opposition would then have to table another no-confidence motion against Najib.

Most believe the BN would rather go to the polls then hand over power to the opposition. Nevertheless, it is within the discretion of the King to dissolve the parliament.

If another general election is called, some BN component parties may chose to exit the coalition and contest on their own, in order to be free to align with the victors.

Even with sufficient support, the journey to Putrajaya will be littered with booby traps. After 50 years in power, few expect BN to go quietly. The closer Anwar gets, the more likely the struggle for power will get dirty, very dirty.

All attempts will be made to remove Anwar from the political scene, at least temporarily, and then exert enough pressure to split Pakatan. While the first attempt at this – creating charges of sodomy while negotiating with PAS – failed to produce results, other such attempts are likely to be forthcoming.

Defecting BN politicians may also see themselves being investigated for corruption overnight.

The battle will not end, even if Anwar succeeds in becoming prime minister. Constitutionally, enforcement and judicial bodies are outside the ambit and control of the prime minister.

Even out of power, Umno may have sufficient influence over the civil service, the media and the police to make governing the country an acrimonious affair.

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