

# How will Anwar play his cards?

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As the leader of Pakatan Rakyat, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has been described as 'Prime Minister-in-waiting', but does he really have the numbers to form the government or is he just playing mind games?



**INSIGHT**  
JOCELINE TAN

joceline@thestar.com.my

**D**ATUK Seri Anwar Ibrahim was all smiles when he accompanied his wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail to the opening of Parliament recently.

It was quite a reversal of role for the former deputy prime minister because he was there as the spouse of the new Opposition Leader.

It was also his first time in Parliament since his fall from power and he was not quite sure what to expect. Dr Wan Azizah was her demure self but Anwar looked a trifle nervous as he held onto his wife's hand.

They are the power couple of Pakatan Rakyat (PR) but given the way the media swarmed around him, there was no mistaking who the star was. Anwar was probably at his most ideal body weight in years, and he looked good in a dark suit and violet tie even though his songkok was slightly tilted.

Some of his Chinese friends joke that his fengshui has changed for the better since he moved out of Damansara Heights to live a simpler life in Segambut in the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur.

The *Economist* has referred to him as "Prime Minister in waiting", and *Time Magazine* named him as among the 100 most influential people in the world.

Anwar is back in the political spotlight amid claims that PR will form the government before the year is out.

Talk of crossovers from the Barisan Nasional to PR has been swirling since the March 8 elections.

On Wednesday, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad added grist to the mill when he said that Anwar's threat of taking over should be taken seriously and that he was a force to be reckoned with.

It was a stunning admission that led PKR Youth chief Shamsul Iskandar to quip: "I'm in agreement with Tun Mahathir for the first time in 10 years."

But it is possible that both Dr Mahathir and Anwar are playing mind-games. They are both consummate political animals, always a step ahead of the rest and with that innate instinct to seize the political moment. And both have that rare X-factor.

Sources close to Dr Mahathir say the former is using Anwar as the bogeyman to scare Umno members into expediting a leadership transition in their party.

As for Anwar, the endless discussions about his being Prime Minister-in-waiting has burnished his image beyond expectations. Even if he does not make it, he will remain a pivotal political figure.

But still, questions abound about Anwar's claim to forming the government. What and where are the numbers? And if he has the numbers, what are they waiting for? When is he going to contest the by-



**Power couple and media frenzy:** Anwar is back in the political spotlight amid claims that Pakatan Rakyat will form the government before the year is out.



**Khairul:** Crossovers may be in the form of an entire party

election that he has been talking so much about?

The PR needs only 30 more seats to secure a simple majority in Parliament.

But there are priorities to be sorted out before Anwar can really lay claim to Putrajaya.

First, he needs more than a simple majority. A government formed on crossovers is unstable enough, what more with only a slim majority.

Second, the Malay composition in the takeover government has to reflect the national scenario if he does not wish to add to the instability. The bulk of crossovers will have to comprise Umno MPs.

Third is the question of having to face a snap general election if he does manage to pull off a coup. Would his coalition be able to face the voters for a fresh and legitimate mandate?

## Question of ethics

Finally, there is the question of ethics and principle. The PR had promised a better and cleaner government, a new politics as they call it. Taking Putrajaya by the back door is not new politics. In fact, it would be the very sort of old politics they have been so critical of.

The scenario, as such, is a bit more complicated than just people



**Anifah:** Sabah treated like stepchild of Barisan Nasional

crossing the floor in Parliament.

Some claim he has secured commitment from barely half of the 30 he needs, while others say he has up to 50 names on the list.

The assumption so far is that he has his eye on Sabah and Sarawak MPs but, said former PKR Youth chief Ezam Mohd Noor, his main target is Umno MPs from the peninsula.

"The Malay and Muslim factor is very crucial for him," said Ezam.

The response in Sabah is said to be quite encouraging but he has limited clout in Sarawak.

At the Sarawak Legislative Assembly this week, PKR's lone assemblyman Dominique Ng announced that there were more than 10 MPs in Sabah who are ready to cross over but "in the case of Sarawak, he was not at liberty to tell as yet."

The Barisan-dominated House was not amused and erupted in jeers and shouts of, "Never!"

"Give us more credit than that. What makes you think that they won't be coming in one kapal (as a party)?" said PKR Youth exco member Khairul Anwar Ahmad Zainudin.

Anwar's DAP and PAS partners have maintained an awkward silence throughout all this.

DAP is caught between their



**Liew:** There will be a domino effect once the crossovers start

desire of federal power and their stand against party hopping.

PAS is even more compromised. Its government in Kelantan had hung on by a thread after the 2004 polls and it had been righteous about Umno trying to lure its assemblymen. It cannot now come out to encourage Barisan MPs to cross to PR.

The younger PAS politicians have no qualms about entering Putrajaya via the back door but the older ones are concerned about what it would mean for their Islamic agenda. They are also uneasy about working with DAP leaders like Karpal Singh and some are still rather unsure about Anwar.

Dr Dzulkifli Ahmad, PAS MP for Kuala Selangor, is all for a PR government but admits that when he looks across to the Barisan bench in Parliament, "there are not many faces that look like they will join us."

There are only 77 Barisan backbenchers and more than half of them would have to cross the floor for PR to become the ruling coalition.

Said a senior PAS leader: "I'm not trying to pour cold water on Anwar's ambitions but it's not easy to get that kind of numbers. People want to cross to a party in power, not an Opposition aspiring to

power."

But several East Malaysian MPs stirred excitement in Parliament on Wednesday when they spoke about being treated like "stepchildren" by the Barisan leadership.

One of them was no less than Datuk Anifah Aman, a former deputy minister and younger brother of Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman.

"You cannot take what they say lightly. They are genuinely unhappy," said DAP strategist Liew Chin Tong.

According to PAS secretary-general Datuk Kamaruddin Jaffar whose friendship with Anwar goes back to their Abim (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, a Muslim youth group) days, the latter has the numbers to form the government.

"I have no details but the number ranges from 30 to the low 40s. He wants a fair spread of politicians from Sabah, Sarawak and the peninsula and they will join out of genuine desire to help Pakatan Rakyat form the government and not for money or posts. And I see it happening sometime in the middle of the year," he said.

And contrary to the general expectation that the crossovers will take place after Anwar contests a by-election, Kamaruddin said it is likely that Anwar will only go into a by-election once the crossovers take place.

Anwar is interested in no less than the very top post and, that way, he will not end up as just another opposition MP if the crossovers fall through.

Anwar has set Sept 16, the date when Malaysia was born, as the day the new government may be formed.

Reliable sources said 17 Barisan MPs will jump soon.

"I believe in the domino theory. If it happens, it will happen en bloc and there will be a flood," said Liew.

It is a prospect that is very possible to some and totally unthinkable to others.