

A year of hits and misses for the govt

The drop in popularity indicates the people's discontent with now the country is being run.

NEXT week will mark a year since Malaysia witnessed a change of government.

After 61 years of continuous rule by a single coalition, Malaysians woke up on May 10, 2018, to a brand new dawn.

How has the Pakatan Harapan Cabinet performed since then? I think most of us are divided on this, but personally I would say it has been a year of hits and misses.

Merdeka Centre, the opinion research firm, says the government's current approval rating is 39%. Compare this to last year, when a similar poll showed that the government enjoyed a 71% approval rating.

The firm said the decline in ratings was likely due to three factors - the condition of the economy as it is perceived by ordinary consumers, the perceived performance of the administration and concerns over Malay rights and privileges, as well as fair treatment of the other races in Malaysia.

Even though polls such as these are not definitive (after all, most surveys and polls before the 14th General Election predicted a Barisan Nasional win), that is an alarm-

ing drop by any stretch of the imagination.

But according to the Prime Minister, criticism and lower popularity were to be expected when Pakatan went from being the opposition to the government.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is unfazed by the drop in approval ratings for himself and the coalition, and has instead vowed to see the government carry out its plans for the country and the people.

The cliché that Rome wasn't built in a day applies here. Malaysians voted for change last year and even though many are unhappy that significant change hasn't yet taken place, the government has to be given more time.

It does not help that some of the Cabinet ministers appear to be out of their depth. From "flying cars" to denial of the existence of LGBTQ, these gaffes have gone hand in hand with policy flip-flops like the recent International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Icerd) and Rome Statute treaties controversies.

As far as his ministers are concerned, the Prime Minister has gone on record as saying that he would

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not impose KPIs for their jobs.

So, it's puzzling that some of his Cabinet colleagues have called for press conferences to announce their "achievements" to the media, while others have even quantified their performances.

Who are they trying to impress? Should the Malaysian public or taxpayers hand over fat bonuses to these ministers?

I think the rakyat are tired of the blame game and constant politicking that is taking place. We demand more transparency from our gov-

ernment and yes, that has been forthcoming. But we also expect our leaders to lead and this has been sorely lacking on occasion.

Our diverse and multi-ethnic nation remains polarised. Race and religion are still taboo subjects that cannot simply be raised in the public sphere. Moving forward, this is something that our policymakers need to seriously look into.

According to a recent World Bank report, Malaysia's economy is projected to expand to 4.6% by 2020, and the country is expected to achieve high-income country status by 2024.

This does bode well because the economy is probably the single most important factor on which the government will be judged.

The man on the street has been hit hard by the rising cost of living and in simple terms, when you don't have money in your pocket, the first people you will blame are the politicians.

But pointing fingers at the previous administration will not help because most of us can see that our institutions are being strengthened and prominent personalities, regardless of their standing, are being

charged in court with corruption.

A year ago, I wrote in this column about how in the new Cabinet line-up, only Dr Mahathir and Home Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin had Federal Government experience.

Yes, a number of the new ministers had some experience in state governments, but governing at a federal level was going to prove far more challenging.

I wrote that it was important for these newly minted ministers to realise that they were elected by the people and, as such, are accountable to the people.

While we have high expectations for this historic line-up, it is also important that Our Cabinet works together to ensure that incidences of corruption, excesses, mismanagement and abuse of power will all be consigned to the dustbin of history. This still holds true.

Electoral change happened a year ago, but this has passed in the blink of an eye. The next 12 months, with a possible change of Prime Minister at the end of it, will be a more accurate barometer of how the Pakatan government intends to take the nation forward.