

An unprecedented move

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PM meets Opposition to find common ground for rakyat

PUTRAJAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob (*pic*) has got cracking before the expected announcement of his Cabinet line-up today.

He met with Pakatan Harapan leaders yesterday in what is an unprecedented move before the announcement of a new Cabinet by a prime minister.

It is unheard of for both sides of the political divide to agree to find common ground to work together, but in this case it had to be done to help Malaysians who have been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and economic slowdown.

"In upholding the advice of Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah Ibnu Almarhum Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Al-Musta'in Billah to calm the political temperature in the country, I met with leaders of the Opposition to fulfil His Majesty's wishes.

"The hour-long meeting focused on the people's agenda to find a common ground in addressing the Covid-19 crisis, saving lives and helping the people affected by unemployment and income loss," Ismail Sabri said in a statement later.

After the meeting, the Prime Minister and the three Pakatan leaders - PKR president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng and Amanah president Mohamad Sabu - jointly signed a statement to mark the consensus reached.

"A mutual agreement was reached to strengthen the function

of Parliament as a responsible and constructive institution, to serve as a check and balance on the executive so that it is more transparent and can meet the needs of the people.

"We also agreed on the importance of judicial independence, institutional reforms and good governance to ensure a more conducive situation for the people and the nation in the context of Keluarga Malaysia (Malaysian Family)," the rare joint statement read.

The Prime Minister is expected to submit the list of the new Cabinet to the King today, which is expected to be a mix of old and new faces from all parties.

The new Cabinet line-up is also expected to see a shuffle of certain portfolios between Umno and Bersatu, unlike conventional practices where certain portfolios are allocated to certain parties.

The actions of the Prime Minister are being closely watched as Ismail Sabri's choice of Cabinet members will determine if this is indeed a new Cabinet or a continuation of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's legacy.

A source stated that the Cabinet will be formed before National Day, which falls on Tuesday.

"The Prime Minister is aware that we must have at least one Cabinet meeting before the country celebrates National Day.

"Ismail Sabri is a senior politician



and he knows that if he does not get the Cabinet finalised by this week, the image of his government would be at stake, as everyone is watching and he has many quarters to please, namely the teams in his own party Umno and the ones

who supported him to be the ninth Prime Minister," said the source.

The source also stated that the Prime Minister was scheduled to meet the King yesterday to present the list of the new Cabinet ministers but the audience was postponed to today as the King was in Kuantan, Pahang.

"Ismail Sabri will have an audience with the King before making an announcement about his Cabinet members. The swearing-in is expected to take place on Friday or the weekend, to ensure that there is a full Cabinet in place as soon as possible as the country is facing a pandemic and many plans for the rakyat need signatures of ministers," said the source.

Bersatu supreme council member Datuk Razali Idris said the party decided from the very beginning, besides the condition that no one facing criminal charges in court should be in the Cabinet, that the Prime Minister was free to choose his own ministers.

"We are a team as Ismail Sabri was also the deputy prime minister in the previous Perikatan Nasional government. Therefore, he knows

who among the Bersatu ministers are able to do their work and perform during the pandemic.

"Bersatu also knows that there is a special relationship between our president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Ismail Sabri. This is why we decided at the supreme council meeting on Aug 21 that we will leave it to the president to discuss and decide with the Prime Minister who are the best people to represent Bersatu at the Cabinet," said Razali.

Umno sources said their proposed list of ministers had been submitted.

Sources also confirmed several new names have been forwarded for the Prime Minister to consider.

While they remained tight-lipped, there is speculation that Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan, Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid and Datuk Azalina Othman Said are on the list.

Former Agriculture and Food Industries Minister Datuk Seri Shabery Cheek said that in forming the Cabinet, the expectation of the people as well as political reality will have to be taken into consideration.

"People will expect a functional Cabinet who can inspire and give them a certain level of confidence.

"But the political reality is that the Prime Minister has a lot of juggling to do. It is not an easy job for him," he said.

Shabery also said the new Cabinet will have to work hard to ensure political stability, adding that failure to do so will erode the people's trust in politicians.