

Good administration

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People want better economy, govt

AT last fortnight's polling day, 15.5 million voters elected their 221 parliamentarians, the selection guided by partisanship, candidates' renown, hot-button issues, sympathy, protest and — not to be understated — cash and kind. Blunt instruments of four alliances forged an uneasy truce to finally exalt Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim into the premiership, and the electorate alluded to an unofficial but significant "referendum", sprinkled in manifestos pitched by competing coalitions. The "referendum" isn't tallied in an official ballot because Malaysia doesn't do referendums — the last and only commission was formed in 1962 to determine the formation of the country. But a referendum it still is, in-your-face meandering missives, animated memes and vexing videos on social media, collectively circumscribed as Anwar's "insane expectations". Alternatively, here is a very demanding wishlist, garnished and sweetened into four dishes:

6 *But preeminently, the civil service's ineluctable makeover must be similar to the safety rule of airlines, in that parents don the oxygen mask first before their kids.*

RESUSCITATE the economy, suppress inflation and boost entrepreneurial opportunities;

REBUILD the 1.2 million-strong civil service into a much leaner and more service-oriented organisation;

CURB corruption, circumvent power abuses and plug leakages and wastage; and

SLIM down the cabinet but commission "exceptional" politicians exuding "leadership and skills" to hold dual portfolios so they can build certitude for Anwar's unified but fragile government.

The difficult complexities of even stewing one of the "four dishes" cannot be underestimated. Yes, economic salvation is seriously underway while a leaner civil service starts with natural attrition. Curbing corruption has resulted in the jailing of an ex-prime minister, but much more needs to be done. As for Anwar's cabinet tantalisingly unrevealed as the deadline loomed for this Leader, we retain hope for a slimmer administration that is worthy of its responsibilities.

But preeminently, the civil service's ineluctable makeover must be similar to the safety rule of airlines, in that parents don the oxygen mask first before their kids. As a filial, cradle-to-grave institution, the civil service needs total rejuvenation before it can boldly tackle corruption within its ranks and an overbloated workforce. But in despairingly arriving this far, it tells us that consolidation and improvement of the political and governance systems also need courage, iron will, reimagination, lateral thinking, grudging cooperation of rivals and, perhaps, a little luck. Deliverance began after Anwar opportuned the civil service with a big break less than a week to go in its two-week deadline — Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Zuki Ali and his departments are to outline a massive plan of targeted subsidies and anti-inflation measures. Still, they are painfully aware that previous administrations had stumbled on a prime directive of this magnitude. Agencies like EPU, ICU and Mampu, familiar and energised in the halcyon 1980s and 1990s, deserve a reboot. This is their chance to shine again.