

# Anwar's cabinet

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## Still, Malaysia must rise

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**P**RIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's cabinet announcement on Friday tells us one thing: politics is hard to do, even for a seasoned hand. A nation as diverse as Malaysia makes it that much more difficult for politics to traverse race, religion and region. Polls, both official and unofficial, told us the people wanted a cabinet that is lean and clean. He has delivered on the first. It is hard to get leaner than 28 given the 38 ministers of the previous two governments. He has promised the second. We must take his word for it. After all, Anwar has the next five years to deliver on his promise.

Not all are happy with the PM's pick. This is only natural, especially given the manifold interests of his coalition partners. Democracy in Malaysia, like elsewhere, demands a generous dose of give-and-take. Call it the demand for diversity. Politics can do either of these two things. Make history or be a witness to history. Anwar appears to want to make history. After all, he has waited 20 years for this opportunity. Or 40 years, depending on what you count as ambition. But he needs time to make history. And we must let him have it.

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We would be naive to think that Anwar didn't struggle before settling on this or that name. There must have been a sleepless night or two. Politics has a reality of its own. When you have all the colours of the world in your coalition, as Anwar does, it is very hard to paint your palette just blue and grey. One man's demand is another man's surrender, you may say. Be comforted. Anwar will be reminded of the promise of a clean government inside and outside of Parliament. Because a clean government is his promise.

Now that the cabinet has been sworn in, let's give the PM the space he needs to act on his words. To hold him to account now may prove to be premature. The horse has its place and so does the cart. Let's grant him space and time to repair and reform, the two things he has promised to do. Monday is a good day to watch as Anwar will be chairing the first cabinet meeting — his nomenclature is special meeting — where he is expected to set the direction for his new government to go where he wants it to go. Sure, we will not know all that happens on Monday, but if what he disclosed in Ipoh on Friday is any indication, new rules of the game of taking Malaysia to a better place will be set there. "New rules" was his emphasis.

Also to be discussed is how the cabinet and the civil service can work in concert to give Malaysia its best five years. This may sound like a given, but it isn't. All we have to do is recall what happened in 2018 when a few new Pakatan Harapan cabinet members, in their "sugar rush" after tasting Putrajaya power, were said to have made governance-defying demands on the civil service. Rules of the game are a must to contain such errant pressure. Malaysia needs new energy from those who govern it. Because it voted for it.