

Realpolitik the order of the day

There will be some turbulence, but rational Malaysians want this government to work.

The Star - 4/12/2022 pg. 6

IT'S certainly not a perfect Cabinet line-up. Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has been pulled from all sides – including by some powerful figures – who insisted on their choice of representatives in Cabinet.

The Prime Minister took a longer-than-expected time to finalise his list as party members and partners in his new unity government bombarded his phone with messages and suggestions.

There were endless meetings, which dragged late into the night as the deadline approached.

Even his 5pm press conference to announce the Cabinet had to be postponed to 8.15pm – and even that began late.

Anwar had to honour his pledge of a leaner Cabinet and balance it with the demands of his partners.

He may have had to plough through some horse-trading and perhaps even appeared to be weak, but the reality is his predecessors took a longer time than he did to decide.

Many may have forgotten that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad took 11 days to complete his full line-up after GE14 in 2018.

Anwar is in a more complicated position. Despite having a two-thirds majority in Parliament, Malaysia is in uncharted waters.

The country has never had a unity government before, comprising partners who just fought a bruising election against each other.

Many openly pledged not to work together and tore each other to bits on the campaign trail.

WONG CHUN WAI
newsdesk
@thestar.com.my



Comment

But they are now strange bedfellows in the same government, and a period of adjustment is needed.

The period of instability and uncertainty will probably cause some turbulence, but rational Malaysians want this government to work.

The alternative, with many hard-line theological politicians, seems unpalatable, perhaps even dangerous for a multiracial country like Malaysia.

After the race riots in 1969, the Barisan Nasional government was formed, which included the then opposition PAS and Gerakan.

It was not called a unity government but the then-coalition government worked and functioned effectively under Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

Fast forward to 2022 and Anwar is sitting on the hot seat. Besides having to face a strong Malay and religion-centric Opposition, PAS – which has 49 MPs – will continue to throw doubt on his leadership.

Already, the Islamist party has used the narrative that the Pakatan

Harapan government is dominated by the DAP.

Like it or not, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi has thrown Pakatan a lifeline for Anwar to be Prime Minister and lead the Federal Government.

Anwar is indebted to him as without Ahmad Zahid, he wouldn't be there.

Ahmad Zahid's inclusion has earned the wrath of Pakatan members, but let's not forget that he faces the same from Barisan parties.

We do not live in a perfect and idealistic world. Realpolitik is the order of the day. Politicians say things they do not mean, and to paraphrase Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli, the end justifies the means.

Anwar's decision to be Finance Minister has invited public criticism, but he had little choice as he needed to balance pressure from personalities who wanted the powerful post badly.

There has also been backlash over the inclusion of former banker Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz, who lost the contest for the Kuala Selangor parliamentary constituency.

But this is not a new practice. Previously, those who had lost in elections have been made senators and appointed as ministers.

This time, PKR's Saifuddin Nasution, who lost his bid for the Kulim Bandar Baharu seat, now heads the powerful Home Ministry while Barisan secre-

tary-general Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir, who was defeated in Lumut, is now the Foreign Minister.

For some reason, Tengku Zafrul has been targeted, but like former health minister Khairy Jamaluddin, both are young talents that Malaysia needs.

Both unfortunately lost in GE15. Likewise, it is sad that PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar lost to PAS in Permatang Pauh.

But the inclusion of popular Segambut MP Hannah Yeoh is welcome although given her personality, she would be more suitable as Tourism Minister rather than Youth and Sports Minister.

Sarawakian leader Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, who is Tourism Minister, is more cut out for an economy-related portfolio although it can be argued that tourism is a crucial revenue-earner.

It is also good to note that Anwar has decided not to go with a politician as Religious Affairs Minister. He has chosen a learned Islamic scholar instead.

(The previous administration, under Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, had a headline PAS minister in charge of religious affairs).

They are bright sparks in Malaysian politics who are ready to cut across the political divide and practise bipartisan politics in a mature manner.

Not many, like Tengku Zafrul, are ready to leave high-paying positions in the corporate world for politics.

How many of us – who prefer to



whine – are prepared to make such a bold move?

It is important that Anwar now focuses on facing the headwinds of 2023. He has correctly placed emphasis on the economy, cost of living and food security, which will affect the people the most.

Besides the economy, the government needs to prove that it can deliver. If it does, it will not need to turn away its attention to politicians who rely on race and religion to win support.

There should also be no place for the politics of revenge and vindictiveness by the new appointees – so leave the civil servants alone.

Malaysians want to see the end of corruption, a better education system, healthier economy, and a fairer government – one that can make them feel proud of their country again.