

A confident Anwar eyes victory

It will be an empowering moment for the Prime Minister if he clears the vote of confidence in Parliament tomorrow.

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PUBLIC opinion was divided about Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's (pic) Cabinet and more so about the lineup of his deputy ministers.

But the general opinion, even among those who are not with him, is that Anwar has transitioned from Opposition leader to Prime Minister with a finesse and style not seen in his recent predecessors.

Or as some have pointed out, he has taken to the job like a fish to water.

The *Financial Times* described his arrival as "one of the world's most extraordinary political journeys" and, indeed, Anwar has been preparing for this role for the last two decades.

"For those who are used to seeing prime ministers who were overly formal and trapped by protocol, it's been like a breath of fresh air," said lawyer and political commentator Ivanpal S. Grewal.

It has been a surprisingly smooth start for "PMX", as Malaysia's 10th Prime Minister is known on social media.

Anwar is getting ready to cross a fundamental hurdle in Parliament in a vote of confidence on Monday.

The King had reportedly asked the Prime Minister if the vote was still necessary.

But it is apparent that Anwar regards the test of numbers as some



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Analysis

sort of personal validation or even a political mandate.

It will be an empowering moment for Anwar.

"No other previous government has sought to show its numbers this way.

"It will silence his critics who say he does not have the confidence of the House," said Ivanpal.

The vote will also be like an arrow aimed at former prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin who had sidestepped the test of numbers by invoking a national emergency.

The agreement of cooperation inked by the five partners of Anwar's government on Friday was another show of force that depicted the Unity Government as represented by parties from east to west and of various ethnic groups,

something which Perikatan Nasional does not have.

There were rumours that some Barisan Nasional MPs would absent themselves.

"I do not know about the others, but I will be there," said MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong who had called on the Prime Minister on Wednesday.

Even Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, who is known to be averse to Anwar, will be present.

With national politics so deeply fractured and divided, the Malay Rulers have emerged as a powerful balancing force.

The Unity Government is seen as a creature of the palace and the King's speech in Parliament is expected to drive home some timely advice for the political players.

For sure, Anwar will sail through the vote of confidence.

Some are expecting him to produce results by his first 100 days while others are prepared to give him six months.

But can this government last five years?

It will be a tough year ahead and managing the economy and reining in inflationary trends must be a priority if this government is to last.

Those in the business sector think the government has to eventually

reintroduce the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

It will be an unpopular but necessary move to increase government revenue.

According to a banking figure, there was disappointment among the business sector that financial whiz Datuk Seri Johari Ghani was not in the Cabinet.

Johari, who is Titiwangsa MP, would have been a welcomed second finance minister had Anwar not been under pressure to scale down the size of his Cabinet.

"Anwar also needs to manage the 'green wave'.

"Anyone who thinks that is not important does not know politics.

"He needs to assure the 80% Malays who did not support him that he can represent their interests.

"Anwar must also be seen as being able to control DAP," said Ivanpal.

The Chinese, especially the middle class, see Anwar as a safer alternative to Muhyiddin, mainly because of their fear of PAS.

It has pushed them to justify having Umno in the government and to praise Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi as a "devil who turned out to be an angel."

A retired Chinese doctor from Penang, borrowing from a Chinese

proverb, said the Chinese have likened Ahmad Zahid to the old man who lost his horse and after searching around, returned with a better horse.

It is the equivalent to every dark cloud having a silver lining.

Meanwhile, Anwar ought to be aware that Muhyiddin has not given up on returning as prime minister.

Informed sources said Muhyiddin declined the Opposition leader post because he did not think a former prime minister should be leading the Opposition bench.

Perikatan leaders also believe they will eventually form the government, especially after the sweeping win in Padang Serai.

Anwar's chief political secretary Datuk Seri Shamsul Iskandar is frank about the challenge of managing Malay sentiments.

He said it is crucial to balance the expectations of the non-Malays who threw their support behind Anwar and the demands and suspicions of the Malay-dominant Opposition.

"Anwar has much to do. But he will be unstoppable if he is able to work on the economy, tackle the green wave and manage Umno and DAP," said Ivanpal.

The views expressed here are the writer's own.