

Anwar wins big in Dewan Rakyat, but it's not forever

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PETALING JAYA: The loud “aye” which Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim gained in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday when the motion of confidence was passed showed his skills in negotiating and winning support from MPs, say analysts.

However, winning the confidence does not mean Anwar will have an easy ride in the future.

There is no guarantee that he will get two thirds of the votes for all his proposals in the Dewan Rakyat, the analysts say.

Universiti Sains Malaysia's Prof Dr Sivamurugan Pandian said the vote yesterday was a reflection of the “unity government projection”.

“This strengthens Anwar's will to keep the unity government he formed and collaborate closely beyond the interests of the different political blocs.

“Although the ‘number’ is not stipulated in the Constitution, the ‘number’ is important not only to show his political legitimacy, but for Anwar to convince and build the trust from the masses,” said Sivamurugan.

He also said that as Anwar was the first Prime Minister to have the support of a two-third majority of MPs since 2004, it might also mean good news for the economy.

Stakeholders will take this to mean there is now a stable government in place.

“This might help to boost the economy, foreign direct investment and the interests of domestic economy players as well.

“Anwar can now put forward his vision for the country.

“In cases which might need constitutional amendments, he may not have to rely on support from the opposition,” said Sivamurugan.

“However, he must amke unpopular decisions and risk being questioned by those in his own government,” he said.

Sunway University's Prof Wong Chin Huat said Anwar could claim that he managed to get “a two-third majority vote minus one” during the election of Dewan Rakyat Speaker Datuk Seri Johari Abdullah, who received 147 votes.

A two-third majority requires 148 votes.

“In Malaysia, the election of the Speaker is seen as a reflection of the government's majority because our Speaker's election is not cross-party,” said Wong, the Deputy Head (Strategy) of the Asia Headquarters of UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

“The vote was secret and there was no fear of repercussions for violating party instructions yet that all government MPs (minus one) voted for Johari. This suggests that Anwar's majority is stable, at least for now,” said Wong.

However, he said no amount of caution by Anwar could prevent a nasty opposition bent on attacking the government and distracting it

from its job.

“The only way to avoid such an attack from the opposition would be to legislate for the formal recognition of the shadow Cabinet,” said Wong.

He proposed that shadow ministers have to be sworn in as the King's loyal opposition and be given commensurate salary, policy research support and access to government information.

“Malaysia is radically outdated. The shadow Cabinet has existed in the UK for more than a century and in Australia for nearly one century but we have nothing of that sort.

“An opposition denied of a constructive role could derail the government's work with wild accusations, just as Umno and PAS did in the 22 months when Pakatan Harapan was in power between 2018 and 2020. More than ever, the shadow Cabinet is a necessity

“To not do so for financial reasons will mean being ‘penny-wise, pound-foolish’. To not do so because of partisan pettiness is suicidal,” said Wong.

While many Malaysians hate paying politicians and would argue that paying shadow ministers defeats the purpose of Cabinet downsizing, Wong said what really made a bloated administration expensive was not the ministers' or deputy ministers' salary, but all their perks.

“Shadow ministers can be limited to just a fraction of minister's salaries, along with a policy research staff,” said Wong.