

Good start but don't stumble on reforms, Anwar told

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PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is off to a credible start in Parliament with the confidence vote but it's only the beginning.

To get the final stamp of approval, he must ensure reforms are carried out, say civil groups.

For one, it was crucial for Anwar to introduce inclusive policies to counter the narrative crafted by the Opposition, said former ambassador Datuk Noor Farida Mohd Ariffin.

"He must do his utmost to implement policies of inclusivity and introduce equal opportunity policies among the races in the country, especially in education and employment.

"In my view, he could begin by

making the New Economic Policy (NEP) needs-based, not race-based," said Noor Farida, a member of the G25 group that comprises senior and eminent former civil servants.

The two-day Parliament meeting that began on Monday saw the swearing in of MPs, the election of a new Speaker and two deputies, the confidence vote on Anwar's leadership, and the passing of a motion for RM107.7bil emoluments for civil servants.

During the meeting, however, there were many fiery shouting matches between MPs across the divide.

Noor Farida criticised Opposition leader Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainuddin for saying that Perikatan Nasional was ready to return to government "when the time is right".

During Hamzah's 10-minute speech in Parliament on Monday, the Larut MP said, "We are ready to be the Opposition and we are also ready to take over the government when the time comes."

Noor Farida said while the nation was concerned about economic issues and the bleak economic outlook next year due to external factors and falling domestic demand, Hamzah chose not to address these bread-and-butter issues.

Institute for Political Reform and Democracy (Reform) executive director Idzuafi Hadi Kamilan commended Anwar for proving the parliamentary support for his leadership.

"This is a novel approach in Malaysia's parliamentary history, and we hope that this practice will be maintained," he said.

However, Idzuafi said it was

important to have a strong Opposition bloc, adding that the government must ensure that there is no sidelining of the other side of the political divide.

"Appropriate funding should be granted to the Opposition leader and they must be provided with researchers. The establishment of a shadow Cabinet should also be done as soon as possible," he said.

Idzuafi said ongoing initiatives on strengthening parliamentary select committees, the reintroduction of Parliamentary Services Act, and equal funding to all MPs regardless of their party, should be continued by the present leadership.

Reform is a group focused on education activities and research on politics and democracy.

Former senior civil servant Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam described the Parliament meeting as disap-

pointing, citing the rowdy behaviour of certain MPs.

"It was undignified, uncivil and quite irrelevant. Some MPs need to be sent out of Parliament," said Ramon, who is a former finance ministry deputy secretary-general.

He said the shouting matches had overtaken discussions on crucial topics that affected Malaysians such as corruption, the rising cost of living, and unemployment, among others.

Ramon added that the newly-appointed Dewan Rakyat Speaker Datuk Johari Abdul played a pivotal role in presiding over Parliamentary meetings and ensuring proper decorum.

"The Speaker could have been much stricter.

"Otherwise, the standard of debates, discussions and discipline in Parliament will decline," he said.