

Anwar's crew changes

Challenges aplenty await them

MALAYSIA has a new cabinet. Will it bring the change people want to see? It better bring. If there were 28 ministers and 27 deputies then, there are now 31 ministers and 29 deputies. This is an expansion, no doubt, but performance isn't about numbers. Otherwise, we would have a per capita number by now. More than numbers, calibre counts. Because therein lies the quality of performance. All eyes will be on the 60 in and outside the cabinet. One thing the reshuffled crew must remember is that they are in Putrajaya for a purpose: to help Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim deliver on his promises to the nation, not to pass the buck to him. This was the error of a few, if not some, in the previous cabinet. Even a primus inter pares needs help. A prime minister is there to marshal the efforts of the cabinet to take the country to a good place, not to do the work of ministers and their deputies.

Much hope lies on the 60 in Putrajaya. It is a new-faces and old-hands story. All must deliver; none must dither. Many have asked for Anwar to be given time after a not-so-complimentary rating in a poll conducted in October by independent pollster Merdeka Center. To be fair to Anwar, October was hardly 11 months of the unity government. Some, from the future king to the man in the Rapid bus, have

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asked for him and his cabinet to be given time. This is Anwar's time. And he has four years of it. Well, almost, given the date of the reshuffle. We hope the country grants him that. Malaysia can't afford any more politicking. The focus must be on getting the country back on track. Moreover, the rating was motivated by the people's concern over the state of the economy, a word that must be

taken to mean many things to many people. For the Rapid bus rider and rural folk, it will be about the availability of local rice, eggs and other essentials at affordable prices. Yes, it is about progressive wages, too. For those who are caught between the top 20 per cent and the bottom 40 per cent income bracket, it's about cost of living issues. Of late, they have become price-watchers like never before.

Certain portfolios will be under watch more than others. The economy, domestic trade and cost of living, as well as agriculture and food security will be the three most areas under scrutiny. The Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry needs a special mention because "stealth inflation", a phrase used to describe either the extra charges imposed or quantities of products reduced by businesses to gain extra profit or revenue, has become prevalent in the country as elsewhere. The scourge has been around for so long that it has a nomenclature of its own: "stealth flation". Corporate greed is a borderless pursuit. The spotlight will be on the Health Ministry and its delivery of public health services, with Covid-19 cases on a "sharp rise" (to use the phrase of the early December update) lately. To be exact, there was a scary spike of 6,796 cases from 3,626 in the epidemiological week beginning Nov 26. The minister has plenty to do.

This is Anwar's first reshuffle. Let's hope there isn't a need for another. A constant churn wouldn't be good for the country.