

ANWAR UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

From cleaning house to a cabinet reshuffle, there was never a dull moment in Malaysian politics

ADIB POVERA
KUALA LUMPUR
adibpovera@nst.com.my

Expectations were high on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim when he was sworn in as

Malaysia's 10th prime minister, following years of political instability that saw the country's administration change three times in four years.

With no clear winner following the 15th General Election (GE15) in November last year, it took the wisdom of Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah to resolve the impasse, which led to the king proposing the formation of a unity government.

The proposal, rejected by Perikatan Nasional (PN), was embraced by Pakatan Harapan (PH), Barisan Nasional (BN), Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) and other parties.

With the backing of 148 members of the Dewan Rakyat, Anwar was sworn in as the prime minister and he formed the Madani government.

Since then, the spotlight has been trained on the PH chairman and PKR president to see if he has what it takes to steer the country to recovery while leading a federal administration comprising DAP, GPS and DAP, as well as foes-turned-allies, Umno.

The *New Straits Times* takes a look at the year that was in

Malaysian politics.

UMNO CLEANS HOUSE, RISE OF NEW GENERALS

Umno's year began with a bang, leading with the sacking of key leaders, including former Rembau member of parliament (MP) Khairy Jamaluddin, in a move seen by political observers as an attempt to solidify party president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's position.

The former Umno Youth chief's expulsion came following his repeated criticism of Zahid's leadership, blaming the latter for the party's poor outing in GE15.

Also shown the door at Umno's supreme council meeting on Jan



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (left) greeting Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad and Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani (right) at the first Special Cabinet Meeting of the Unity Government in Putrajaya earlier this month. PIC COURTESY OF PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

27 was former Selangor Umno liaison committee chairman Tan Sri Noh Omar. The party veteran was initially slapped with a six-year-suspension order, but he requested that Zahid sack him instead, to which Zahid agreed.

The same meeting also saw six-year suspensions issued to several leaders, including one-time Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein and ex-Umno information chief Shahril Sufian Hamdan.

Two months later, Umno's party polls for the 2023 to 2026 term led to the return of Datuk Seri Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail, Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin and Titiwangsa MP and former Finance Minister II Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani.

STATE ELECTIONS: LITMUS TEST ON MALAY SUPPORT

Nine months after GE15, voters in six states went to the polls again on Aug 12.

Of the six, three states were under PH administration, namely Penang, Selangor and Negri Sembilan. The remaining three — including the rice bowl state of Kedah, as well as Kelantan and Terengganu — were under Pas and its allies in PN.

While the state elections did not have a direct impact on the federal administration, they were widely viewed as a litmus test for the unity government's performance to date and an assessment of whether the opposition's much-vaunted "green wave" was still in effect.

The polls were also seen as a test of sincerity and the effectiveness of the vote transfer between supporters Umno and DAP, now in the same administration.

The showdown, which involved 570 candidates from nine parties vying for 245 state seats, ended in a status quo. However, it saw PH and BN losing as many as 22 of the total 56 seats to PN in Selangor.

THREE DEATHS, FOUR BY-ELECTIONS

On July 23, two weeks before the state elections, the country was rocked by the sudden passing of domestic trade and cost of living minister Datuk Seri Salahuddin Ayub of a brain haemorrhage.

Salahuddin, who was Pulai MP and Simpang Jeram assemblyman, as well as Parti Amanah Negara deputy president, was synonymous with rolling out the "Payung Rahmah" initiatives meant to alleviate cost of living woes among the people.

The following month, the country mourned the death of 10 people, including Pelangai state assemblyman Datuk Seri Johari Harun, who was among those who died in a tragic air crash in Elmina, Shah Alam.

On Sept 15, Datuk Talib Zulpilip, the state assemblyman for Jepak in Bintulu, Sarawak, died of kidney complications.

The deaths triggered four by-elections. In Pulai, ex-Johor state speaker Suhaizan Kayat helped PH recapture the parliamentary

seat while Nazri Abdul Rahman ensured Simpang Jeram remained in PH's fold.

BN, meanwhile, retained Pelangai after its candidate, Datuk Amizar Abu Adam, secured 7,324 votes to beat his two other rivals.

Iskandar Turkee of GPS won in Jepak, thus ensuring that the seat remained aligned to the federal administration.

SHIFTS IN POLITICAL ALLEGIANCES

On Sept 10, Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (Muda) president and Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman announced that the party would no longer be part of the Madani government.

The Muar MP said the government's move to drop the 47 corruption charges against Zahid made it difficult for Muda to remain with the government.

Two months later, Syed Saddiq was found guilty of corruption over the misappropriation of funds belonging to Muda youth wing, Armada. He later relinquished his post as Muda president.

The opposition pact, meanwhile, saw a number of elected representatives switch their allegiances to Anwar's administration.

Four Bersatu MPs — Zahari Kechik (Jeli), Mohd Azizi Abu Naim (Gua Musang), Datuk Iskandar Dzulkarnain Abdul Khalid (Kuala Kangsar) and Datuk Dr Suhaili Abdul Rahman (Labuan) — declared their sup-

port for Anwar's government, and soon followed by Bersatu's Bukit Gantang MP Datuk Syed Abu Hussin Hafiz Syed Abdul Fasal.

CABINET RESHUFFLE

Two days after the Madani government marked its one-year anniversary, Anwar ended months of speculation when he reshuffled his federal cabinet.

Apart from five new faces being added, the reshuffle also saw an increase in cabinet members from 28 to 31, with the separation of Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change, as well as Communications and Digital Ministries.

The new faces included former Employees' Provident Fund chief executive officer Datuk Amir Hamzah Azizan as finance minister II, the return of Titiwangsa MP Johari as plantation and commodities minister, Damansara MP Gobind Singh Deo as digital minister and Kuala Selangor MP Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad as health minister, taking over from Dr Zaliha Mustafa, who was moved to the Prime Minister's Department to look after Federal Territories affairs.

Datuk Armizan Ali was appointed domestic trade and cost of living minister, left vacant following Salahuddin's death.

The reshuffle also saw Anwar replacing Batu Gajah MP Datuk V, Sivakumar with former deputy finance minister Steven Sim as the new human resources minister.