

# Anwar the tightrope walker

MALAYSIANS are witnessing what was unthinkable not too long ago - a unity government, comprising people who used to be bitter foes for decades.

And with 149 MPs, this administration is also the first to hold two-thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat since the Barisan Nasional coalition lost it in the 12th General Election in 2008. It has one more than the 148, which Barisan had.

Barisan's 30 MPs now form the second largest bloc of lawmakers in the ruling coalition. Pakatan Harapan has the most with 82, Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), 23, Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS), six, Warisan, three, one each from Muda, Parti KDM (Resajahteraan Demokratik Masyarakat) and PBM (Parti Bangsa Malaysia) and two Independents.

In the past, the Dewan Rakyat was often described as a circus, no thanks to the antics and behaviour of its regular clownish and beastly MPs.

What does this 15th Parliament, the second session of which began on Monday, hold in store?

Would the MPs heed the advice of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah, said in his last opening for the current parliamentary session?

The Ring said MPs should not presume that the people are indebted to them nor expect to be lauded for doing their jobs.

"Safeguard the good name and honour of this august House and serve wholeheartedly as representatives who always have the people and the future of the country close to your hearts," he said.

## The 10th PM's immediate concern is not on reforms but shoring up his strength as the leader of a motley coalition.



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## Along the watchtower

If the Dewan Rakyat continues to be compared to a circus, the focus has shifted to the funambulist who has taken the centre stage.

That tightrope walker is the country's 10th Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. He has to move with extreme care and precision and navigate diverse political situations with the minimum of errors.

It is obvious that his immediate concern is not on his much-touted reform agenda but on shoring up his strength as the leader of a motley coalition.

With Perikatan Nasional still a formidable force with PAS and Bersatu, he has to tread cautiously to keep the pact intact, at least until the state elections for Redah, Kelantan, Negri Sembilan, Penang, Selangor and Terengganu are held this year.

These states did not dissolve their legislative assemblies together with

Parliament for the 15th General Election on Nov 19, 2022.

It is also apparent that he has learnt the lessons of the previous PH government, which alienated the Malay-dominated civil service by introducing sweeping changes as soon as it came to power in 2018.

Although Anwar had emphasised *islah*, an Arabic term that roughly means "reform" or "change", in his first address to civil servants, he has quickly dismissed suggestions to reform the existing state of the public service.

The latest call was made by Penang Deputy Chief Minister II Dr P. Ramasamy, who said the Malaysian civil service was not only bloated but also mostly consists of Malays.

He said the new unity government, which is instilling the Malaysia Madani slogan, should not ignore this. About 90% of civil servants in the country now are *bumiputra*.

Ramasamy attributed the current situation to discriminatory policies introduced by former PM Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"The old argument in favour of Malay domination of the civil service to counterbalance the Chinese domination of the economy is no longer valid.

"The often-repeated apologetic reasoning that non-Malays shy away from the civil service because of the lack of promotional prospects cannot be sustained in view of the

overt and covert forms of racial discrimination," he said in a Facebook post, which resulted in leaders within Pakatan calling for him to be sacked.

In response, Anwar said the government did not see it as an issue.

"We're not considering the proposal as I do not think it is a problem now," he said, adding that it was the Penang DAP deputy chairman's personal opinion and one that did not reflect DAP's stance.

"He can offer his views, but they will have no bearing on DAP or the government's decision," he said.

In his article on the Malaysia Madani concept last week, long-time Malaysia watcher Murray Hunter noted that values promoted were sustainability, well-being, creativity and innovation, respect, confidence, and courtesy.

He said reforms were necessary to achieve these aspirations, adding that the key to reform was to re-emerge from a one-dimensional mindset and opening up to the universe of new ideas.

"However, for as long as there is a 'Malay agenda' mindset within the current members of the civil service, there can be no Malaysia Madani, or reform that would help to create it. The civil service must shift from their 'Ketuanan Melayu' mindset, towards a 'Ketuanan Malaysia' mindset. Anwar himself said 'Ketuanan Melayu' will become 'Ketuanan Malaysia' in his adminis-

tration," he wrote.

Murray said there must be a cathartic move away from the present corporate culture towards embracing the inclusive thinking that Malaysia Madani demands.

But the issue of a bloated civil service made up of one ethnic group and the amount paid out yearly for pensions is but one of a long list of reforms needed by the country.

Among them are the rising cost of living, drastic changes to the education system, legislative reforms to reflect true representation of the people, overhaul of key institutions, including the police through the setting up of an Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC), and the endemic corruption across all strata of government and politics.

Hopefully, these crucial matters are raised by MPs during the newly introduced hour-long Prime Minister Question Time (PMQT) in the Dewan Rakyat on Tuesdays.

Like all funambulists, Anwar is expected to carry a balancing pole, which, in his case, comes in the form of his usual nimble rhetoric.

Just as the pole helps a tightrope walker increase rotational inertia, maintain stability over the narrow rope and add more weight below the centre of gravity for balance, expect PM10 to use his rod to adroitly deflect the pertinent issues.

**Media consultant M. Veera Pandiyan likes this quote by H. L. Mencken: "Democracy is the art and science of running the circus from the monkey cage." The views expressed here are the writer's own.**