

# PMX needs to shine in 2025

The lack of a rival contender and a bit of luck were some of the things that helped Anwar through 2024, but he will have to pull off an economic turnaround in the coming year.

DATUK Seri Anwar Ibrahim is ending the year on a high with an approval rating of 54%.

The data from the Merdeka Center survey is impressive at a time when public opinion about politics and politicians is often as noisy and diverse as a busy coffee-shop.

The Prime Minister has managed to hold his ground despite a year where controversial court decisions and economic issues often overshadowed efforts by the unity government for a better Malaysia.

His first year in power was the proverbial honeymoon, but 2024 has been what political commentator Khaw Veon Szu calls a "reality check" or even a wake-up call about what it means to be in power.

"Next year will be crucial for the unity government because the general election will, politically speaking, be around the corner. Excuses will not work anymore, it is time to deliver," said Khaw.

It has not been easy for Pakatan Harapan politicians to deal with the responsibilities that come with being in charge.

This year, Pakatan leaders were criticised the same way they used to fire at the previous government.

Some quarters have questioned the survey, asking how is it that the Prime Minister's approval rating is 54%, if 53% of those surveyed think the country is going in the wrong direction?

Moreover, economic issues



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## Analysis

such as inflation and cost of living were among the top concerns identified by the survey.

Despite announcements of billions of ringgit in foreign direct investment, people have yet to feel it in their pockets and salaries have remained static, whereas prices of goods have gone up.

"He is the default choice because there is no one else who can offer a more compelling narrative," said political analyst Ivanpal S. Grewal.

Well, let's just say Anwar has been lucky and in the right place at the right time.

His possible rivals are either too old or sickly, in jail or narrowly escaped going to jail or out in the political wilderness trying to stay relevant.

But luck is a capricious thing and political will will be needed to navigate the coming year.

So, what are the challenges ahead for Anwar?

"It is obvious the economy will loom over him. The government can no longer put off the subsidy

rationalisation for RON95.

"Can they implement it as painlessly as possible? It will be disastrous if not handled well," said Ivanpal.

The economy has always been the No.1 issue in every election, even though corruption, race and religion are much easier to weaponise on the ceramah stage.

Hungry voters who have to tighten their belts are not happy voters.

Ivanpal said Anwar will have to spend more time on home ground because his hectic travel schedule has given people the impression that he is less than concerned about home issues.

"The unity government will be at the inflection point in 2025. It is crucial that it pulls off a turnaround on the economy and delivers the promised political reforms," said Ivanpal.

Anwar is guaranteed to shine like a star next year when Malaysia assumes the chair of Asean.

"It will be a boost for Anwar. He is a natural performer on the international stage and it will lift the image of the country," said Khaw.

According to Khaw, political stability has been the understated success of Anwar.

For several years, Putrajaya was like a revolving door for one short-lived government after another, but Anwar's strong numbers in Parliament - regardless of the fact that it is a marriage of convenience - has essentially damp-

ned attempts at another backdoor government.

However, the outcome of the Sabah election, which is expected next year, will also have bearing on the prevailing stability.

It is terribly messy on the Sabah front and the seeming lack of action on the graft scandal involving a string of state government leaders has raised questions about why the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission has yet to pounce.

All this was topped off by the controversial appointment of Tun Musa Aman as Sabah Governor.

Pakatan leaders had demonised the former Chief Minister so viciously that his return was like mud flung back in their faces.

Periodic assessments of the government and its leaders such as the one by Merdeka Center are important for the government to take note and stay on course.

People in power sometimes lose touch with the world out there because of the presence of sycophants as well as little Napoleons.

"I am pretty sure that the Prime Minister, despite his excessive travelling, is very much in tune with what people are saying and thinking," said Ivanpal.

Anwar is a polished political animal and one must not underestimate him.

He often comes across as a sociable person, he can sing and dance on stage, joke and recite pantun, but it is best not to test his killer instincts, going by the way

the instruments of state have been used to go after political enemies.

He would want to end 2025 on the same high note as in 2024.

But can Anwar keep all the pieces on the chessboard ahead of the next general election?

For instance, his anak murid Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi has become less than predictable of late.

The Umno president is signaling that the party has options.

He has indicated that Barisan Nasional has yet to decide whether to face the general election as part of the unity government while lashing out at PKR for trying to poach Umno members.

The interesting thing is that despite the uncertainties, the opinion out there is that Anwar is more likely than not to win a second term, but he should watch out for surprises.

There is currently an effort to create a movement of Malay political parties and groups, which liberal-minded Malaysians have been fast to condemn as racist and unprogressive.

But identity politics has a powerful momentum and there is a huge Malay voice out there.

If that movement takes off, it could spell danger for the unity government, given its ongoing struggle for the Malay vote, and it could be the black swan in 2025.

**The views expressed here are entirely the writer's own.**