

PM needs to reshuffle his Cabinet

The powers that be need to focus on the economy instead of being tempted to indulge in witch-hunts against enemies or get distracted by moving shadows of a political coup.

THE recent photograph of former prime minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob lying motionless on a hospital bed caused a stir, especially in Umno.

He had apparently passed out as a result of high blood pressure in the early hours of the morning last weekend.

There was an outpouring of well wishes for his recovery and also a fair bit of snarky comments from some Umno elements who pointed out that there was not a single tube poking out of his body or the usual hospital machines to monitor someone who is unconscious.

You see, Ismail Sabri, despite being known for his sweet and down-to-earth temperament, has not been all that popular in the party.

The hardcore Umno crowd remains resentful of how he allegedly collaborated with Bersatu to become prime minister, and each time Parliament is on, he can be seen making a big show by fraternising with Perikatan Nasional MPs. That annoys people in his party.

Then came news that four of his former aides had been called in for questioning by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), and soon there were whispers that Ismail Sabri might be trying to avoid the MACC.

According to a well-placed source, the talk going around in Umno is that the whole saga was sparked by an alleged love affair

JOCELINE TAN



Analysis

involving one of those implicated that had turned sour.

The details are rather saucy, but it is stricdy speculation at this point.

Matters took yet another twist when it was reported that there was some RM100mil in funds involved, and it was said that those in power were worried that this kind of money could be used in a coup against the government. Or to put it crudely, to buy over MPs.

Quite immediately, an old meme of Ismail Sabri portrayed as a would-be prime minister and flanked by Bersatu deputy president Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin and PAS vice-president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar started popping up on social media.

It was as unrealistic as suggesting that Khairy Jamaluddin would be the next prime minister.

"Ismail Sabri does not have the gravitas to pull off a coup," said an aide to a former Umno minister.

A prerequisite of premiership is that one has to be the president of

a party or the leader of a coalition. That is the way politics and power work in the country. A prime minister candidate does not simply appear out of the blue.

It is unclear where the MACC investigation into Ismail Sabri's former political team is heading, but the burning question is why a government with such a strong majority in Parliament is still rattled by moving shadows.

There is a hungry Opposition out there that will not stop trying to annoy and destabilise the government of the day. But even its leaders know that Malaysians have no appetite for another backdoor takeover.

At the same time, what the Opposition is doing is what Pakatan Harapan did to the Barisan Nasional government. Some call it karma - what Pakatan used to do with such finesse has returned to hit them.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is approaching the mid-term of his administration, a juncture when the electorate wants to feel that this government has delivered and made a difference to their lives, work and future.

His ministers have been repeating the feel-good mantra about foreign direct investments, growth rates, jobs, controlling inflation and, for a while, the strengthening ringgit.

The Prime Minister has established a name for himself on the international stage, and this is his big year in a starring role with

Malaysia assuming the Chair of Asean.

Perhaps the blip in his global journey was the failure to snag that phone call with US President Donald Trump.

No matter how many times Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz tries to explain it away while declaring that he wants to help Anwar win a second term, the fact is that the former ambassador to the United States failed to get the phone call for the Prime Minister.

The Madani administration should try not to get distracted by the noise and to focus on the economy because that will decide the fate of the government in the coming years.

"The political noise can get too loud, and the PM has to ensure that it does not overwhelm or drown his achievements," said lawyer and Umno politician Ainul Aizat Ahmad Ishak.

That is the name of the game, and according to Ainul Aizat, political skirmishes with opposition parties, civil society and social media warriors will heighten rather than ease off.

For instance, PAS is planning to protest the Urban Renewal Act.

On Thursday night, thousands gathered in Kuantan in support of their sovereignty.

"It is not a political thing. We are here in solidarity with our Sultan," said Pahang State Assembly Speaker Datuk Seri Mohd Sharkar Shamsudin.

But it was without a doubt to

signal that many did not agree with the way the addendum issue, which they equated with a royal decree or "titah Tuanku", was handled by Putrajaya.

The Prime Minister has to keep calm and carry on.

No prime minister has enjoyed a two-thirds majority since 2013, and Anwar should be more than assured that he will complete a full term.

However, said political commentator Khaw Veon Szu, political stability in the coming years will hinge on a winning formula for the Sabah state polls and the loyalty of Sarawak, which is due for a state election next year. This could be followed by state polls in Melaka and Johor.

"All this will determine what the rest of his term will look like. It would be good if the PM could secure the Malay mandate. He has tried so hard, but whatever he has done does not seem enough for the Malays.

"The green wave is first and foremost an Islamic and Malay wave, whereas Anwar is the leader of a multiracial party. The key thing is still the economy," said Khaw.

And if the economy is going to be his priority, he may need to reshuffle his Cabinet and put people with credibility, economic experience and know-how in the right places.

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