

Anwar must rebuild trust between East and West Malaysia: Analyst

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PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim must move swiftly to rebuild trust between East and West Malaysia in the wake of Datuk Ewon Benedick's resignation, which has sent ripples through the country's political landscape.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia political analyst Assoc Prof Dr Novel Lyndon said Ewon's move carries profound symbolic weight, reflecting deep-seated frustration among Sabah leaders over the perceived limits of their influence within the federal structure, particularly regarding the 40% revenue entitlement under the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63).

"Symbolically, his resignation is rooted in principle. It sends a message that even senior East Malaysian leaders feel constrained in championing state rights at the federal level.

"This sentiment reinforces long-held grievances that Sabah's interests are often sidelined and could intensify narratives of marginalisation between East and West Malaysia," Novel told *the Sun*.

He said the federal government must act quickly to prevent the issue from escalating and reassure Sabahans of its commitment to full implementation of MA63.

"Anwar is expected to initiate political outreach with Sabah and Sarawak leaders to reaffirm his administration's dedication to MA63 and establish a clear channel for dialogue.

"To preserve regional balance and avoid feelings of neglect, appointing another Sabahan minister, ideally from the same or allied bloc, would be an important symbolic gesture of inclusion."

Novel said the government might also need to recalibrate its legal and policy messaging, particularly concerning the position of the Attorney-General's Chambers on the 40% revenue entitlement.

"Putrajaya may have to clarify or soften the AGC's stance to demonstrate that it is listening to Sabah's concerns and acting in good faith."

He said Ewon's decision has effectively transformed what was previously seen as a legal or administrative issue into a political flashpoint for Sabah's autonomy movement.

"This development could embolden other Sabah leaders, both in government and the Opposition, to take stronger positions on MA63, not just on revenue but also in areas such as education, energy and resource management."

While Ewon's resignation may rally public sentiment in Sabah, Novel cautioned that it also leaves a significant vacuum in federal representation.

"His departure creates not only an empty Cabinet seat but also a political vacuum marked by diminished legitimacy and trust.

"By stepping down, he loses direct influence in federal decision-making. So, while the moral message is powerful, Sabah's institutional voice at the table is now weaker."

Novel said the challenge now is to turn symbolic momentum into practical gains.

"Civil society and regional NGOs would likely use this moment to push for more public discussion on fiscal equity and regional fairness.

"However, real change would depend on political will and sustained negotiation with the federal government.

"Some within the Gabungan Rakyat Sabah coalition may use the issue for leverage but others might prefer continued diplomacy over confrontation, especially ahead of the state election."

He said while calls for autonomy are likely to intensify, the true test lies in whether the federal government can deliver tangible outcomes, particularly in fiscal and development matters.