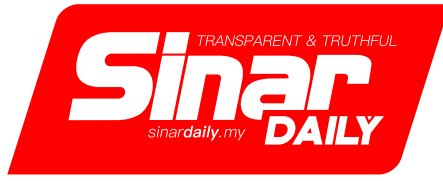


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OPINIONS

Only time will tell but Anwar's moves has been blunders so far

CHECKERED REALITY

By SYAZA SHUKRI

10 Feb 2023 08:41pm



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It has been about a minute since Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim became our Prime Minister. Since then, there have been some blunders and also some achievements.

This, to be honest, is nothing remarkable. There is no such thing as universal condemnation or approval especially towards a government that is a coalition of coalitions.

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Except to politicians who have tasted power, no one genuinely envies our prime minister. If he moves too fast, he would be accused of repeating the mistakes of 2018 but if he moves too slow, supporters of the opposition would start asking on social media, “what has been done?” And that is a fair question.

After coming to power in such a fragile and polarised political atmosphere, the government is expected to prove itself daily. And I believe our ministers are fully aware of that.

At the same time, anybody who has ever experienced a transition—professionally or personally—understands that something worth doing takes time. It is the expectation of a miracle that has caused the government to go for quick fixes even at the disapproval of some.

Let’s be honest and start with a few of the perceived missteps by the government. The first is appointing Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi as Deputy Prime Minister. After boisterous claims to fight against corruption during the campaign trail, our prime minister had to negotiate a deal with Zahid despite him facing 47 charges involving Yayasan Akalbudi.

Of course, our prime minister has reiterated that the executive will not interfere with the judiciary, but no one can deny that the optics do not look good. Politics, unfortunately, is about managing public perception and this is strike numero uno.

Similarly, no one can forget Rafizi Ramli’s vicious attacks relating to the littoral combat ship (LCS) scandal. Months later and in the position as Economic Minister, nary a word has been said. In fact, the government plans to continue with the project albeit the non-existence of even a single ship. Strike two.

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The most recent outrage is over the appointment of Nurul Izzah Anwar, the prime minister's daughter, as his special advisor. To make it worse, the public was informed of it through an interview almost a month after the supposed date of appointment.

Again, the prime minister tries to justify that without any benefit, the appointment is far from being an act of nepotism. Yet, public perception towards the government, and the prime minister specifically, could have seen better days.

Besides the prime minister, his cabinet has also seen mixed results. Transport Minister Anthony Loke is of course the poster child of a hardworking minister in the unity government who literally hit the ground riding the LRT to assess the improvements needed to our public transport.

We also had some gaffes such as the alleged discrimination of an SPM workshop in Johor over the Chinese New Year holiday. Regardless of the school's "intention," the minister could have handled it better. Similarly, the silence by the Home Affairs Ministry regarding proper attire to make a police report is deafening.

Does the Unity Government's report card look bleak, then?

There are some good initiatives. But even these initiatives have met with considerable criticism.

For example, with high expectations that Anwar would lead the country to greener pastures under his reform agenda, the government announced a new "slogan"

which is Malaysia Madani. This addiction to slogans is in line with previous administrations.

Detractors pointed out that people need more than a slogan to improve bread and butter issues. While it is true that sloganeering doesn't mean much without action, the difference between Malaysia Madani and the other slogans is that Madani is not a new concept among those who have followed Anwar's career closely.

He has spoken and written extensively about it, showing that it is a well thought-of idea instead of something that is conjured up for the purpose of leading the government.

Similarly, in a creative move, the prime minister responded to the burning of the Al-Quran by an extremist right wing politician in Sweden by denouncing the act and announcing the distribution of a million copies of the holy book. Instead of pouring gas on fire, he responded through an act of love which is spreading the peaceful message of Islam in the words of the Quran.

Again, this is not met with universal approval, which is expected. Some pointed out it might be a waste of resources to do so. Others question to whom will the Qurans be given to?

Just to round up some of the better initiatives by the government so far is the recently announced Menu Rahmah.

On the surface it was welcomed by the people as part of the government's program to lower the cost of living especially for the working class. For RM5, patrons can get a complete meal from participating outlets who are acting as willing sellers. Initial criticism is that this does not appear sustainable.

Secondly, it has been pointed out that the Menu Rahmah does not help in reducing the overall price of food items which have become a huge burden to the people. In response, the government acknowledged this is not meant to be a long-term solution.

To be fair, the government has only been in Putrajaya for a mere two months.

Structural reforms take time. Policymaking takes time.

Budget has not even been tabled yet.

Within these constraints, the government has to use what little it has to improve public perception and increase support even if their efforts seem more akin to publicity stunts.

Criticism towards the government is good. It is welcomed!

A truly democratic government cannot function being surrounded by people who are blinded by their twenty-plus years of struggle to not see when mistakes have been made.

Hopefully, the government accepts criticism with an open heart, apologises where needed and offers remedy when required.

At the same time, there is a reason that elections for national governments are typically conducted every four to six years in most democratic countries.

Governments should be given the time and space to come up with a plan and to execute them.

Remember, something worth having takes time.

We are living in a fast-paced world where if it is not instantaneous, it is considered late. This is where the government needs to master the act of managing expectations.

They don't need to respond to every little criticism because there are those who will never see the good in anything the government does for ideological reasons. But the government needs to have a two-way relationship with the people.

Otherwise, support would quickly wane.

Unfortunately for the unity government, time is not on their side with state elections coming up soon.

Syaza Shukri, PhD is an assistant professor of political science at International Islamic University Malaysia.

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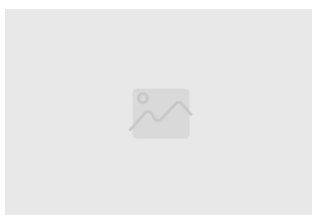
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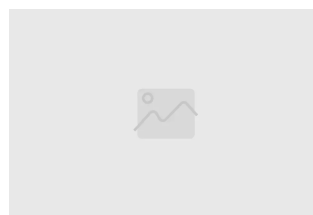
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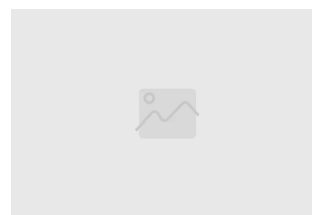
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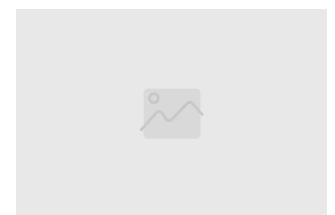
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