

## **Is Mahathir losing the war against Najib?**

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**By Nigel Aw**

More than two months after former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad commenced his open hostility to Najib Abdul Razak in a bid to oust him, the prime minister does not appear ready to concede any time soon.

Najib is not taking Mahathir's punches lying down, for he has mounted his counter-offensive to shore up support, doing so in a general election-like campaign.

Unlike Mahathir's swift ouster of his immediate successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, both sides, this time, appear to be digging in for a long battle.

So, has the 89-year-old Mahathir, who holds a record of forcing out a prime minister and two deputy prime ministers, finally lost his mojo?

It all depends on the measure of success, says Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) chief executive Wan Saiful Wan Jan.

"If winning means getting Najib to resign, then, of course, it has not been achieved yet.

"But if winning means taking the right steps to gradually ensure Najib is forced to resign, then Mahathir has been hugely successful," Wan Saiful (photo) told Malaysiakini.

Despite public declarations of allegiance for Najib by his cabinet ministers and large crowds holding 'I Love PM' banners at rallies to shore him up, things have not been smooth for Najib.

Already, Mahathir's campaign had sowed discontent among some within Najib's cabinet, forcing the prime minister to declare an ultimatum that his ministers resign if they do not support him on the 1MDB issue.

"The ministers are appointed by Najib, so, of course, even those who privately dissent will publicly say they support Najib or organise large crowds for him.

"So when there are people publicly declaring support, I will not just take it with a pinch of salt. I will just completely dismiss all that.

"This is a political charade and we should expect everyone in the cabinet to declare they fully support Najib but some will be plotting behind his back, Wan Saiful said.

### **Some have voiced dissent**

Some in the cabinet, such as Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, have voiced dissent

behind closed doors, as seen in a leaked video, but others such as Rural and Development Minister Shafie Apdal were less subtle.

Shafie and Defence Minister Hishammuddin Hussein (photo) were among the two said to be wanting to resign from the cabinet over disagreements with Najib, but their reactions were widely different.

While Hishammuddin took pains to explain that all was well between him and his cousin Najib, Shafie's rebuttal was why he should have to resign for merely raising issues on a matter of public interest.

Wan Saiful acknowledged that Mahathir, who will turn 90 next month, has started something that has grown beyond him and this will likely continue even without Mahathir.

"He has started the campaign (against Najib) and the ball is now rolling.

"Even if he were to withdraw from the campaign now, the ball will continue to roll," Wan Saiful said.

### **Damage has already been done**

Asked about Najib's counter-manoeuvre, including introducing a restructuring plan for 1MDB to placate dissent over the company's massive RM42 billion debt, Wan Saiful said believes the damage has already been done.

"We need to realise this is not a debate about facts. This is a political competition and perception is all that matters.

"This is a matter of perception. Once the perception has been created and if you don't kill the perception immediately, then it becomes too late.

"When someone accuses you of lying long enough and the masses believe, then it doesn't matter even if you are telling the truth, because the people will feel you are lying," he said.

Even though Wan Saiful said he has viewed Najib's New Economic Model favourably, he holds an objective view that the prime minister's future is not bright.

"It doesn't matter that I believe in his vision. The reality is, politically speaking, Najib is coming towards his end as prime minister," he added.