Bersatu polls: Showdown between Dr M and Muhyiddin?

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A total of 189 Bersatu divisions are set to vote for their new national leadership next month, which could set the table for a renewed clash between Bersatu chairperson Dr Mahathir Mohamad and its president Muhyiddin Yassin (above).

Following the collapse of the Pakatan Harapan government, Mahathir had wanted to form a new government of technocrats that did not follow party lines but was out-manoeuvred by Muhyiddin, who joined forces with PKR defectors, BN, PAS, GPS and other minor parties.

Muhyiddin, who was sworn in as prime minister on March 1, had also sought to take control of Bersatu by assuming the position of acting Bersatu chairperson, ignoring Mahathir's official hold on the position.

Mahathir had resigned as Bersatu chairperson on Feb 24, but his party convinced him to stay on, which he agreed, and Bersatu secretary-general Marzuki Yahya issued a statement on Feb 27 confirming that Mahathir was still the party

chairperson.

Muhyiddin, in trying to wrest control of Bersatu, had on Feb 29 declared himself the acting party chairperson, ignoring the Feb 27 statement.

According to Bersatu's constitution, the position of chairperson is the ultimate authority, superseding the position of president.

Muhyiddin's move to seize control of the party’s top post means the seat is now in dispute but this will not last for long, for the members go to the polls on April 18 in the party's maiden leadership election.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, an observer, who is part of Mahathir's circle, said the former prime minister won't back down in the party election and Muhyiddin would need to formally challenge Mahathir for the position of chairperson.

Just a month ago, Bersatu had indicated that the party's top three positions, namely chairperson, president, and deputy president, which is held by Mukhriz Mahathir, won't be contested.

But this has now appeared to change.

Bersatu, in a statement last night, said all leadership positions, including the top three, would be contested.

Regardless of whether Muhyiddin challenges Mahathir, Mahathir is bent on getting rid of Muhyiddin, whom the Langkawi MP claimed had stabbed him in the back, from the Bersatu leadership.

The observer said Mahathir's son Mukhriz, who is also the Jerlun MP, will likely contest the position of party president.

If Mahathir succeeds in retaining the position of chairperson on April 18, the new Perikatan Nasional (PN) may be threatened even before Parliament convenes on May 18.

"If Tun wins, he is expected to bring Bersatu out of PN," he said.

Mahathir has been vehemently opposed to Muhyiddin's willingness to include Umno in the new government as several of its leaders are facing graft charges.

For Muhyiddin's part, he has stressed that the ministers he appointed have been cleared by the MACC and do not have pending graft charges.

However, Mahathir is still unhappy that such leaders are still on the government bench, albeit without ministerial positions.

By next week, a clearer picture of the showdown will emerge as candidates are nominated on March 16.

The confirmed candidates for the various Bersatu positions will be announced on March 23.

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