

## **COMMENT | PM's tricky dilemma: To go in dignity or stay in infamy**

**Malaysiakini**

**19 October 2020**

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COMMENT | To metaphorically describe the dilemma distressing Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and certain Umno and PAS factions, and Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim, they are “huddled closely on a leaking boat floating in a shark-infested sea.”

Understandably, no one leader is prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice of abandoning the boat, albeit with a life jacket, to reduce the worrisome load and slacken the leak (read to buy time) until, they hope, rescue arrives.

The palpable dilemma is this: it is one thing to battle for Muhyiddin’s administration to soldier on or to aggressively dislodge the prime minister legitimately.

But what is the true motive behind such a move, which is another matter altogether? Is it to help Malaysia deal appropriately with the Covid-19 pandemic

and prevent impending economic collapse or is it for vested interest or to prevent certain politicians from facing corruption charges?

Muhyiddin is entrapped in a tricky no-win situation: if he tries pleasing some politicians or satisfies the demands from certain Umno factions, it would naturally invite negative reactions, not only from his allies, but also from his opponents.

His slim majority, from the moment he built them from the Sheraton Move that led him to be prime minister, would undoubtedly be assertively challenged.

On the other hand, if Muhyiddin tries to buy time for himself and does nothing or ignores the various demands advocated by allies in the administration, his slim majority is still going to be poked for holes.

In this situation and if the country wasn't facing a devastating pandemic, it would be ideal for the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (above) – with the advice of the outgoing prime minister – to agree to a snap general election within 60 days, and let voters decide who should govern the country.

Nevertheless, if Muhyiddin has had enough trying to please the various factions to no end and does the honourable act of stepping down, the entire

administration collapses.

This premise horrifies politicians surrounding him, even those in Umno who are not part of his administration, mostly because they worry about the “unknowns” if he resigns.

The expected question most people would ask is: who should be the next prime minister in the interim? An interim prime minister, unlike a caretaker version, with the same, full powers of a sitting prime minister?

In the meantime, a scrutiny of Anwar’s strange audience with the King on Oct 13 has dented the PKR president’s credibility, especially after the palace issued a statement that chided and contradicted his claims.

Realpolitik at its coldest and ruthless

Now, there are reports of several MPs, including those from his own party once aligned with him, rushing to abandon Anwar as if he is a “sinking ship”.

This is realpolitik at its coldest and ruthless. Not many have the stomach for it.

In any case, Anwar can no longer be reputed as a credible player or a force to be

reckoned with. Anwar is no longer seen as a potential candidate for prime minister.

That leaves only two statesman-like politicians who can actively hold the country together, regardless if they are able to collaborate:

First, Pejuang chairperson and former two-times prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, still observed by many analysts as a very influential “strongman” and perhaps, also as a “kingmaker” who can game or influence support from many MPs across the political divide.

Second, the sage of Gua Musang, former finance minister and former international trade and industry minister, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, an established Umno stalwart and a persuasively low-keyed player for two generations.

An economist who founded Petronas and other national institutions, Tengku Razaleigh assumes the mantle of the Father of Malaysian Economic Development in his momentous role in establishing and implementing key foundations and policies of the Malaysian economy.

Malaysia being in a vulnerable and precarious situation now, it would be worth

emphasising that while new blood is needed to infuse in a later take-over, the country's urgently-needed next chief executive should exude wisdom, experience and utmost integrity, more than just honesty, but also commitment, responsibility and accountability, with gobs of competence or ability.

The right modes of integrity and competence (IC) should also be the criteria to select the new – hopefully slim and very effective and performance-driven and technocratic – cabinet, which many MPs, unfortunately, can't even measure up.

However, these MPs have a crucial role: being the check-and-balance and serving well their respective constituencies.

If Muhyiddin were to step down soon, the new prime minister to be sworn in by the King must secure the freedom to appoint the best ministers, without interference or pressure from self-serving political elements, to repair and “steer this leaking ship from stormy waters”.

The era, and it has been a long epoch, of playing politics with people's lives, health and economy, are grinding to a halt.

The new administration – and there are indications it is assembling soon – must be eclectically relished with the support it needs.

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Source: <https://www.malysiakini.com/news/547130>