

Some opposition bigwigs offering Muhyiddin a way out

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As the prospect of a state of emergency and the suspension of Parliament looms, several opposition figures have offered Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin an alternative.

Muar MP Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman got the ball rolling yesterday by proposing a "confidence-and-supply" arrangement.

In the Westminster system, a confidence-and-supply agreement is one whereby a party or lawmakers agrees to support the government on motions of confidence or supply (budget) bills, as opposed to a coalition arrangement where all member MPs are expected to vote in favour of the government on every bill.

While there are no examples of this in Malaysia, Syed Saddiq said such arrangements were seen in 1977 when the UK Labour Party formed such a pact with the Liberal Party and in 2017, when the Labour Party-New Zealand First

coalition formed a pact with the Green Party.

Syed Saddiq's condition for such an arrangement was that no general elections should be held until the Covid-19 situation stabilises in a year or two, with the opposition still playing their role.

Secondly, he proposed equal constituency allocations for all MPs, thus removing the need for defections.

Lastly, Syed Saddiq called for bipartisan committees in the passing of important bills.

Earlier today, Iskandar Puteri MP Lim Kit Siang proposed that Muhyiddin be given until Nov 6 to determine whether it was possible to work out a confidence-and-supply arrangement or other options.

"This is so that there could be an 'all-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' war against the Covid-19 pandemic led by the 222 MPs in Parliament," he said in a statement.

When contacted, the veteran DAP central working committee member declined to state if his party had received overtures, but said he was in agreement with

some points made by Syed Saddiq.

Such sentiments were not new coming from DAP figures. On Aug 18 and Oct 22, DAP organising secretary Anthony Loke had mooted a "ceasefire" and called on Muhyiddin to explore bipartisanship.

At the time, Muhyiddin's hold on the government was already tenuous and was facing pressures from allies Umno and rivals PKR.

Separately, Warisan president Mohd Shafie Apdal today said that emergency was not an option and called for "unity".

Shafie, who was defeated by Muhyiddin's coalition in the Sabah election on Sept 26, said he was ready to bury the hatchet.

"I plead to all leaders in our beloved country to put aside our differences and work as one to overcome the greatest challenge that we are facing, and to put King, country and the people first before all other issues.

"We may not agree on many things most of the time, but at this moment, I think we can agree on one thing - we love our country.

"May Allah give us all the wisdom and guidance to choose the right and correct path for the benefit of the country," said the Semporna MP.

Muhyiddin had called a "special" cabinet meeting on Friday. Following this, he led several cabinet members and top security officials for an audience by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

All this led to intense speculation that an emergency proclamation and the suspension of Parliament was imminent.

Muhyiddin's government is slated to table Budget 2021 on Nov 6 with voting beginning on Nov 17.

However, some Pakatan Harapan MPs told Malaysiakini that a confidence-and-supply arrangement might be harmful.

Shah Alam MP and Amanah information chief Khalid Samad said such an arrangement might set a wrong precedent for prime ministers who lose the majority.

"The right way is to have a confidence vote. If Muhyiddin wins, even by one vote, we can consider the case closed, and we go for the confidence and supply

arrangement.

"If he loses, we choose a new PM and move forward. Otherwise, you may set a precedent for future leaders - lose the majority, then threaten to declare an emergency to force confidence-and-supply," he said.

Lembah Pantai MP and PKR information chief Fahmi Fazil said he was not against a confidence-and-supply arrangement if it could lead to some form of a political breakthrough.

"In practice, I am sceptical. Muhyiddin could have extended an olive branch sooner to show he is sincere, for example by not only allowing more extensive data sharing between the Health Ministry/ Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre and the Selangor Task Force on Covid-19 (STFC) but also by involving the opposition leader as well as menteri besar and chief minister in NSC briefings and key decisions.

"But this has not happened," said Fahmi.

Muhyiddin, he said, needs to build trust and could do so by pledging not to declare any form of emergency and reach out to the opposition.

"Without this crucial first step, it may render the entire discussion moot," he said.

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