

Dr M wants Samy out, but mum on Taib
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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad thinks that MIC president S. Samy Vellu should quit his post altogether and vamoose "if he knows what's good for him".

The only reason he gave is that he (Mahathir) is no longer in government and neither are the others who were once with him.

mahathir cyberjaya lecture 220409 q&a sessionSo, by this simplistic logic, Samy should do the same disappearing act as well and not unnecessarily clutter Mahathir's (right) neat picture of the world.

Not that Samy quitting MIC would be the end of Umno's political problems in winning back its two-thirds majority in Parliament and the states that it conceded to the opposition in the last general election.

But why is Mahathir picking on Samy, like a schoolboy bully, when we have the equally glaring case of Rajah Abdul Taib Mahmud in Sarawak?

Like Samy, he refuses to go away as well and continues to squat on the people. Taib became Sarawak chief minister even before Mahathir became prime minister in early 1981.

Mahathir has come and gone, although many thought he would never leave. Taib, despite a recent bout with colon cancer, is still in office.

He tries to keep up appearances with his trademark sarcastic grin, oversized glasses, enormous green rings on almost all his fingers, a pair of white shoes sometimes and a row of bomoh-blessed hats at the rear window of his Rolls Royce.

He shows no signs that he would be stepping down soon. His excuse, after a good 30 years, is that he still has much unfinished business. He can't explain why he hasn't been able to finish his work, or plunder or whatever, after three decades in office.

Everyone knows that he has certainly been getting richer and richer over the years. He has never denied it and never declared his assets.

The poor have been getting increasingly poorer. Sarawak, like neighbouring Sabah, is among the poorest states in the country nearly 50 years after they helped form the Malaysian Federation.

The beginning of the end for Taib?

bukit selambau by election samy vellu ceramah 010409 04Yet Mahathir sees no reason to call Taib to quit as well along with Samy (left).

The reason is clear: If the past is any indication, the Sarawak Rajah can be relied upon to bring in most of the 31 parliamentary states in the state for the ruling Umno-led BN coalition.

So, even the MACC (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency Commission) steers clear in awe of

Taib. Integrity and credibility has gone out the window in Sarawak.

Not surprisingly, as Taib gears up for the forthcoming state elections, which must be held by the middle of next year, it's clear that he won't have an easy time like in previous outings.

He got a taste of what is to come during the recent Sibu parliamentary by-election when the opposition, against all odds, wrested victory from the jaws of defeat.

Taib is not likely to lose the state election anyway given the lack of an alternative local coalition. Hence, Mahathir's silence on Taib more than outstaying his welcome.

Still, the Pakatan Rakyat is likely to take him down more than a peg or two if they can get their act together. Sibu portends the unraveling of Sarawak for the BN. That Taib would lose his coveted two-thirds majority in the state assembly is more than a dead certainty.

Losing his head, however, would mean that the Ibans, Malays and Melanaus would have to desert him too. At present, it has been estimated conservatively that only 15 to 25 percent, 10 to 15 percent and five to 10 percent of these communities respectively support the opposition.

sarawak diverse population percentage breakdown of race 160106It's a different story with the other communities viz. Bidayuh, Orang Ulu and Chinese who support the opposition in the order of 55 percent, 45 percent and 65 percent respectively, according to most conservative estimates on the ground.

If the opposition alliance can engineer strategic splits in the Iban, Malay and Melanau vote banks, there's a fighting chance that it can scrape together the numbers to form a simple majority in the state assembly. This won't happen in a straight one-to-one fight with the Sarawak BN.

There needs to be many-cornered fights to split the BN vote bank. CigMA (Common Interest Group Malaysia) is said to be working on this strategy in Sarawak and a different one in Sabah.

The maths for winning the next polls

Translated into the general election, the BN is likely to lose up to a third or more of the parliamentary seats in the Sarawak.

De facto PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim reckons that he needs only 10 parliamentary seats in Sarawak, and an equal number in neighbouring Sabah, to help his coalition seize the reins of power in Putrajaya by 2013.

bn supreme council mt meeting sapp sabah issue 190608 taib mahmudAll this number crunching shows that the next state election will be Taib's last. If Taib is already a looming liability, Umno cannot afford to be saddled at the same time with Samy.

Samy, however, has no intention of leaving anytime soon and therein lies more good news for the opposition.

True, he has announced a timeframe by which he will quit i.e. eight or nine months before his term expires in May 2012. But since he has yet to present his plan before the Central Working Committee, no one is holding their breath.

Samy quitting will be damage control for Umno provided that he leaves MIC intact for the BN. Again, since anything good for Umno will be bad for the opposition, Samy not leaving MIC is a blessing in disguise.

If Umno kicks out MIC from the BN, extremely unlikely despite Samy refusing to go away, things will be even better for the Pakatan. Umno will be history with a Pakatan-Plus coalition with MIC.

There are no guarantees that Samy is not thinking along these lines despite his pious professions in the past of undying loyalty to the BN.

If Umno feels under no obligation to be loyal to Samy, he would likewise be tempted to feel no obligation to be loyal to the BN. This would be the case when his own survival and political legacy is at stake.

For Mahathir and Umno, damned if Samy doesn't quit MIC and damned if he does.

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