

**Muhyiddin's protestations of loyalty raise eyebrows**  
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COMMENT It's not puzzling that Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin should re-ignite speculation, and unnecessarily so, that he's perhaps not on good terms with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

deputy prime minister muhyiddin yassin at sekolah menengah sains hulu selangor 020410 02In fact, no one was thinking about the issue until Muhyiddin (left) brought it up.

The DPM used the launch of a hyped-up version of an Information Department propaganda tract, 'Najib Tun Razak - Melakar Transformasi Malaysia' (Sketching Malaysia's Transformation) as an excuse to revive public debate on his now hot, now cold, ties with his chief.

But Muhyiddin is barking up the wrong tree and will get little sympathy from the public.

It was needless of Muhyiddin to declare, yet again, that he is loyal to Najib. Abdul Razak Hussein, Najib's father, never swore even once that he would remain Tunku Abdul Rahman's loyal and faithful DPM.

Razak stayed quietly in the background, away from the limelight. Muhyiddin, like former DPM Anwar Ibrahim, refuses to do this.

We don't hear US vice-president Joseph Biden publicly swearing loyalty every now and then to the President of the United States Barrack Hussein Obama. Biden, like a good vice-president, is seen but not heard. Muhyiddin should take a leaf from this.

If Najib and Muhyiddin are really not on good terms, and again this wouldn't be surprising at all, it's entirely the latter's fault if we consider Biden's position.

Biden's post is at least mentioned in the US constitution. The same cannot be said of Muhyiddin. The Federal Constitution only mentions the prime minister, appointed by the King, and his council of ministers. The federal constitution does not allow for a deputy prime minister.

An administrative convenience

The first deputy prime minister, Abdul Razak, was appointed by then-prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman more as an administrative convenience. The DPM is not equal to the PM or his heir apparent. That's not how the federal constitution works.

NONEThe Tunku also mentioned that with Razak (right) as DPM, he was making sure that a Malay from Umno would succeed him as prime minister.

This was a touchy point during Tunku's time because there was some suspicion that Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew wanted to be prime minister of Malaysia.

This was after Donald Stephens of Sabah dropped his opposition to Malaysia. It's believed that Lee promised Stephens that the latter would be his DPM when he became prime minister of Malaysia.

In fact, the DPM has no authority whatsoever except what little is delegated to him by the prime minister. He can't push around the other ministers either as if he can lord it over them. Former deputy prime minister Musa Hitam has bitterly complained in public that "Samy Vellu had more power than him".

As DPM, Muhyiddin is here for one purpose and one purpose only, according to the Umno high command i.e. to take over from Najib as prime minister should something happen to him. That's all. The federal constitution, of course, differs on the Umno take on the premiership.

Meanwhile, Muhyiddin can occupy his time at the office by counting the paperclips on his desk. This is also the job description that fits the vice-presidency of the United States, according to former vice-president Lyndon Baines Johnson, and based on the premise that a ship cannot have two captains.

No one is yet saying that Muhyiddin must go but that's likely to happen if he doesn't watch his step. Anwar was a "giant" in his time even if much of it was bluff and bluster. Even Anwar had to go. So far, Muhyiddin has been working very hard like Anwar to shorten his stay as DPM.

Precedents from the past

There are other ample precedents from the past i.e. at least from the time of the then deputy prime minister Mahathir Mohamad. This man got too big for his boots as deputy to Hussein Onn. Hussein, who, being the gentleman he was, decided to gracefully make way for Mahathir.

Hussein Onn If Hussein (right) had stood his ground, it's more than likely that Mahathir would have been replaced by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Everyone knew that Mahathir had been parachuted from the top by Hussein on the advice of his predecessor and brother-in-law Abdul Razak, as the late premier lay dying at a London clinic. Razak reckoned that Mahathir, who had no grassroots support, would be a good deputy to Hussein. He reckoned wrong.

Mahathir could not wait to be prime minister and even cleaned out Hussein's office at the Prime Minister's Department while the latter was away in London for medical treatment.

Mahathir, as prime minister, deliberately reckoned that no deputy was fit to succeed him and embarked on a pre-emptive strategy to cut all of them down to size.

Musa played into Mahathir's hands when he came up with the idea of the 2M Administration - Mahathir, Musa. That was the beginning of the end for Musa. Mahathir saw 2M as a brazen attempt by the former to equate himself with the latter in preparation for taking over sooner rather than later. After Musa's departure, Mahathir quipped that 2M meant Mahathir Mohamad.

Ghaffar Baba What happened subsequently to Ghaffar Baba (left) and Anwar, both Mahathir's DPMs, is just so much history. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, another Mahathir DPM, finally made it as PM but not for long. Najib came in by default.

All these must be playing on Najib's mind. Surely he must be wondering why Muhyiddin keeps crossing swords with him in public on important policy initiatives on which he has worked hard to persuade the public. How long will he just hold his peace and before saying "enough is enough".

Najib cannot continue to cultivate an ineffectual image, no thanks to Muhyiddin, that his administration is one of flip-flops lurching from crisis to crisis.

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