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Is there an Umno snowball in the making?

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Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's frank speech at the Cheras Umno meeting was widely seen as a move to create momentum ahead of the party's division AGMs.

DATUK Seri Syed Ali Alhabshie is no stranger to controversy and it looks like the Cheras Umno chief has whipped up another political storm.

His division's decision to invite Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin to open the Cheras Umno AGM is the talk of the party and the Deputy Prime Minister's speech has sparked off fresh speculation of the split between Umno's top two.

The Umno division chiefs' Telegram chat group has been on fire since Sunday night when news of Muhyiddin's comments on 1MDB went out.

Umno politicians tend to see an agenda in every corner and Syed Ali has come under attack. Some in the chat group have even accused Muhyiddin of betraying his party and the Malays. They have asked him to resign if he is not with Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Actually, what Muhyiddin said was not new. He wanted answers to the 1MDB issue, he said the Prime Minister was the best person to answer and he wanted the investigation into the matter to be completed as soon as possible.

He chose his words carefully and he spoke not like he was addressing a *ceramah* but as in a formal speech.

He also stressed that he was speaking out because he was concerned for Umno's future and not because he wants the Prime Minister's post.

It did not go down well with Najib's supporters who promptly accused Muhyiddin of trying to be a hero and for announcing that Umno would lose in the next general election.

A text message going around even told him off for agreeing to the postponement of the party polls. The message said that he should have pushed for the polls to be held as scheduled so that he could contest and clean up the party.

To be fair to Syed Ali, Cheras Umno likes to do things in style. Its functions are always graced by big names from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Najib.

"Look, I am a party man. People are blaming me for inviting Muhyiddin but he is No. 2 in our party. I have no control over what they say. They are behaving as though I invited the opposition leader," said Syed Ali.

Well, these are interesting times and some in Umno do see Muhyiddin as the "opposition leader" of Umno.

Besides, the Cheras division also invited Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir to officiate at the joint opening of its three wings.

Mukhriz did not hold back and made a veiled attack about leaders who cannot accept criticism.

But the Cheras division is one of those urban Umno divisions where members are informed about issues and have opinions.

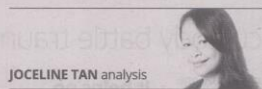
According to Cheras Wanita chief Datuk Zurainah Musa, the meeting's permanent chairman had, at the start of the AGM, asked delegates not to touch on the 1MDB issue.

"We were upset because we want to touch on everything of concern to the party.

"Our delegates just went ahead to speak up because they want answers and solutions. There is no hidden agenda, we just want to move forward," said Zurainah.

The delegates also went on to pass a resolution calling for the entire 1MDB board to be thrown out.

But they also passed resolutions supporting Najib and Muhyiddin and calling for the swift resolution of the 1MDB issue.



JOCELINE TAN analysis

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The implication is whether what has happened in Cheras will be replicated in other division meetings that will take place until the end of August. Will things snowball from here as others take the opportunity to express their misgivings about the hot potato issue?

"1MDB is the burning issue especially in west coast states.

"Anyone addressing the division AGMs will have to talk about it. It will be crazy if you insist on talking about party unity or something like that," said political analyst Dr Azmi Omar.

Muhyiddin's speech, rightly or wrongly, has been seen as a strategic attempt to create political momentum ahead of the division meetings.

He knew what he was getting into, he was fully aware of how the media would seize on it and he is certainly not naive about how it will be interpreted.

"Tun Mahathir seems to have exhausted his options, he is now repeating himself. I guess it's Muhyiddin's turn to voice out," said Dr Azmi.

In fact, when Muhyiddin returned to his seat after making his speech at the Cheras meeting, he turned to Syed Ali and said rather apologetically: "Syed, I am sorry. This is your function."

Anyone familiar with Umno politics would know that very controversial issues are often brought up at Umno division AGMs every year, most of which go unnoticed and unreported.

But this is no ordinary year. Najib has been under attack by one of the most awesome personalities in Umno. It is evident that he and his deputy are no longer on the same page and Muhyiddin apparently did not attend Najib's birthday do last week.

Are things about to blow wide open? Najib reacted immediately and reminded everyone, including Muhyiddin, of the ongoing investigation on 1MDB and asked them to wait for the outcome.

Najib likes to sit on issues and his swift reaction showed that he wants to prevent a snowball effect.

It would be a mistake to underestimate Najib. He is the epitome of the Malay gentleman but he is a political animal through and through.

For instance, Najib will be officiating at the division AGM of Semporna which is headed by Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal.

Shafie was his one-time loyalist who is now seen to be with Muhyiddin. Najib keeps his friends close and his ex-loyalists even closer.