

Newspaper	The Star
Date	24 May 2015

Muhyiddin joins the fray

The deputy prime minister has often been seen as a contented No.2 but his stand on the 1MDB issue has put him in the spotlight.

The Star - 24/5/2015

LIKE a boxing match. That is how some have described the clash between Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

It is not exactly Mayweather versus Pacquiao but it comes close to that, politically speaking that is.

Najib is still holding some of his punches out of regard for the elder man but Dr Mahathir being Dr Mahathir, is going for a knock-out punch.

That episode involving the Dewan Rakyat Speaker's attempted resignation showed just how far Dr Mahathir is willing to go to undermine Najib, to the extent of turning a private discussion into a political punch. It was not a gentlemanly thing to do but boxing is not a gentleman's sport.

All that has been edipsed by the video circulating of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin hammering away at the 1MDB debacle.

It was a side of Muhyiddin that few had seen before. His critique of 1MDB, his body language and the words he used have rippled through the Umno rank and file.

The Deputy Prime Minister has often come across as rather stiff, formal and humourless. But in the video, he was animated, he spoke like an orator and he had the crowd in the palm of his hand.

But Muhyiddin's newfound oratory talent aside, the big question is whether he has jumped into the boxing ring. It was evident from the video that he was extremely critical of the 1MDB issue and, as he said in the video, he intends to "take the bull by the horns".

Then in a lighter vein, he added: "I will face the bull but I am not too sure who the bullis."

He has taken an uncompromising stand on 1MDB. He is not holding anything back, at least behind closed doors. It is only a matter of time before he takes it outdoors.

The Muhyiddin video was recorded at an Umno retreat in Janda Baik where the party has a training complex. That Eriday was actually his 68th birthday, he had just had a

Joceline Tan
Analysis



haircut and he felt it was time to be open about things.

The retreat dmsions - Pagoh (headed by Muhyiddin), Bentong (Pahang Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob), Pontian (Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Ahmad Maslan) and Hulu Langat (Datuk Johan Abdul Aziz).

Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi was there in his capacity as Training Bureau chairman together with his deputy Datuk Radzi Manan who is also Kampar division chief.

The theme of the retreat was about preparing the party for the next general election. Muhyiddin spoke for about 90 minutes and veered into the 1MDB issue in the second half of his speech.

His argument was that the issue, if not resolved, will pull down the party in the general election, a point which he illustrated rather dramatically by holding his hands in the air and dragging them down to near his knees.

Ahmad Zahid seemed a little uncomfortable. The Umno vice-president is trying hard to stay above the fray and looked like he did not know whether to laugh or to cry. He kept tugging at his ear lob as though his ears hurt at what he was hearing.

Pontian's Ahmad was clearly unhappy. He is a Najib man and he looked like he was trapped in a chicken coop. He sat through the 1MDB part of the speech looking down at his clenched hands.

Adnan looked like he was enjoying it, holding up his hands to applaud.

But when contacted after the event, Adnan urged everyone not to over-read into the event. He said what happened was "straight, plain talking" as to how to tackle

the 1MDB issue.

"I want to stress this. At no time did he say directly or indirectly that PM needed to resign. He did not imply that he's capable and ready to take over nor did he state direcdy or indirectly that PM committed a serious criminal offence.

"He was merely giving his opiriion as to how to go about handling the issue and how to diffuse the situation. The audience accepted his remarks well and with enthusiasm," he said.

Very few in Umno want to see a fight. They have seen what it can do to Umno. The 1987 leadership fight split the party down the middle while the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim sacking led to the formation of PKR which has absorbed Malays who would otherwise have joined Umno.

Umno would not be able to recover from another big fight.

To be fair to Muhyiddirt, he has for the last year or so resisted attempts from various individuals and groups to persuade him to "do something".

During the talk, he also slammed stories of a "secret meeting" while he was in Italy as "bohong dan fitnah" Oying and slander).

He was referring to the claim by former Umno/PKR politician Datuk Zaid Ibrahim that Muhyiddin had met with several Umno figures including former finance minister Tun Daim Zainuddin to hatch a plot.

An Umno insider said that what Muhyiddin voiced out in Janda Baik was basically what he had told Najib during a four-eyed meeting sometime ago. He had said more or less the same during the last Umno supreme council meeting.

Is Muhyiddin preparing to mount a challenge?

It is hard to tell at this point in time. But he could be signalling that he is ready to move up if the 1MDB fiasco is not resolved.

"I think he will be telling it like it is from now on," said Terengganii Umno veteran deputy chief Datuk Wan Albakri Mohd Noor.