

Newspaper	NEW STRAITS TIMES
Date	16 JULY 2016

Dr Mahathir desperate to carve a political path for Mukhriz

NST-16/7/2016

FORMER prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, 90, is a desperate man these days.

He announced yet another desperate move on Thursday to set up a political party that would unite all others in a grand coalition against Barisan Nasional.

I see this as a desperate attempt to save his badly damaged legacy and to obtain a permanent political presence for his son, Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir wants a new political party to act as a vehicle for himself, his allies and his son.

He wants to form his own political party, but will let other parties join up to form a grand coalition against BN, but his focus remains on toppling Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Dr Mahathir has, however, left many questions unanswered.

For one, what will happen to Pakatan Harapan after everybody joins the new party? How will the new party be structured? Will it be for Malays only or will it be multi-racial? And, if so, will it steal the thunder from PKR? Is Dr Mahathir taking the opposition for a ride again? Opposition supporters want



answers to these questions.

Above all else, they ask this — will the new party merge with Umno once its sole objective of removing Najib has been accomplished? Won't this leave Pakatan Harapan in the lurch?

The attempt to marry disparate political groups under one roof, a dream for many politicians like Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, has failed before and will fail again.

It will fail this time because Dr Mahathir has only one overriding motive, which is toppling Najib who is seen as a major obstacle to his son's rise in Umno.

Dr Mahathir is not trying to influence voters with people-centred issues, like the worsening economy, a big political fallout in BN or the break-up of Sabah and Sarawak.

Toppling Najib has been Dr Mahathir's bugbear and he has been at

it for well over a year now.

His earlier attempts had all failed. His attacks on Najib over 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) failed and he moved on to the bid to collect one million signatures to press Najib to quit by seeking an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

When that failed, he corralled the feuding opposition, which, sensing blood on the floor, rallied to Dr Mahathir's Save Malaysia campaign, which also failed miserably.

Soon after, he gave up criticising Najib and enthusiastically began campaigning in the June 18 parliamentary by-elections in Sungai Besar and Kuala Kangsar. He attempted to turn the polls into a referendum on Najib and 1MDB, and the opposition swallowed it hook, sink and barrel.

But instead, the voters gave BN majorities, bringing Dr Mahathir's referendum plan to an abrupt end.

But still, he persisted and is now back with a new venture, a political party that can give Mukhriz an enduring presence in the nation's politics.

According to an Umno insider, Dr Mahathir's primary aim is to entrench Mukhriz in a leadership po-

sition in Umno and, hopefully, inherit the party presidency from the former's ally, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, the deputy president who was sacked along with Mukhriz.

"The fact is simple — he has no confidence in Najib and Najib, too, has made it clear that he will not bend to Dr Mahathir's desires," said the insider.

"Dr Mahathir's plan has all along been to remove hurdles in the path of Mukhriz's rise in Umno.

"Mukhriz was on the rise, but Dr Mahathir became too impatient and saw an opportunity to push matters over the 1MDB issue."

An Umno veteran said: "The men on the streets are asking — how will the toppling of Najib and replacing him with either Muhyiddin or eventually Mukhriz better their lives or move the country forward in the prosperity score? They don't buy Dr Mahathir's arguments.

"They see this latest move as a desperate ploy by the ageing veteran to provide for his son.

"Dr Mahathir was a prominent political leader before, but his hobnobbing with the opposition shows that he has indeed fallen on hard times.

"He is trying to extricate himself

from a lot of missteps, but, instead, gets caught in another twirl.

"His objectives are too narrow and will further divide the already divided opposition."

At Thursday's meeting, neither PKR president Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail nor her daughter and PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar were present. PKR secretary-general Rafizi Ramli was absent, too.

"This indicates the deep mistrust that they have for Dr Mahathir as the man who threw (opposition leader Datuk Seri) Anwar (Ibrahim) in jail.

"They see his involvement in opposition politics as a big setback for Anwar's *reformasi* ideals," a political analyst said.

Although Anwar has welcomed Dr Mahathir's move to unite the opposition under one banner, he is worried that his ideals, like *reformasi*, would be trod on.

Many opposition leaders say they are tired and want to return to the values they had championed before Dr Mahathir entered the picture.

It is a desperate race against time for Dr Mahathir, who has to save his damaged legacy and provide for his son's political fortunes.