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# Azmin ready for centrestage

joceline@thestar.com.my

The complicated and fluid situation in Pakatan Harapan may require PKR deputy president Datuk Seri Azmin Ali to play a focal role in dealing with all the big personalities and egos out there.

It was the second time that the Sultan of Selangor had attended the state Hari Raya open house. This year, Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah brought along his son, the tall and handsome Crown Prince Tengku Amir Shah.

Their appearance gave the event that certain oomph! and those in the know knew that the presence of the royal guests had a lot to do with the warm ties between Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali and the palace. Azmin's mother Che Tom Yahya was also there, and it was quite a special moment when mother and son posed for a picture with the Sultan. Azmin later said that the photo, which was posted on his Facebook page, was his favourite from the entire day of festivities.

His Hari Raya speech at the event also marked his understanding of the Selangor socio-political landscape. He knew that the guests, be they civil servants, businessmen or ordinary folk, included supporters of Pakatan Harapan and Barisan Nasional.

He did not talk politics, he did not blast the Barisan Nasional and he did not mention any political party. Instead, he spoke of the spirit of Hari Raya, he addressed the multi-cultural make-up of Selangor and assured everyone of the state government's commitment to safeguard the people's rights and concerns.

September will mark his second anniversary in the hot seat and he has, by most accounts, done a decent job.

The fact that he has kept his state government running and in one piece despite the fact that DAP and PAS are at war says a lot of his management and people skills.

The Selangor government is arguably the most peculiar in the country because the government comprises what one might describe as two partners and an opposition party. PAS and DAP are at loggerheads, they were on opposite sides in the Sungai Besar and Kuala Kangsar by-elections, but all that does not seem to have affected their state ties.

Azmin's ability to hold together the diverse elements in his administration the last two years has positioned him for a focal role in the opposition alliance that is in a state of flux.

A new political party, headed by no less than Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is in the process of being formed.

The former premier announced the setting up of the new party just days after celebrating his 91st birthday. Age is just a number for this formidable personality, and he was in his element as he fielded questions from the media at his Perdana Leadership Foundation office, flanked by leaders of DAP, PKR and Amanah.

Details about his party were vague, but from the hints dropped by Dr Mahathir, the party or "grouping" as he called it, will be a "vessel" for those who cannot fit into existing parties like PKR, DAP and PAS.

The party is likely to be led by Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and the primary aim is to topple Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Umno.

Muhyiddin, who was overseas at the time, has since expressed his support for the new development. Former Umno bigwigs like Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal and Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir would also be part of it.

Perkasa president Datuk Ibrahim Ali is also slated to join the new party and told the media a few days later that "there will be no new party without 'Tok Him'".

Dr Mahathir said he will play a leading role but quipped: "Not necessarily the president and not necessarily the candidate for prime ministership."

He was reluctant to reveal more than



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**Giving birth:** Age is no barrier to Dr Mahathir who is preparing to set up a new political party that will be part of the opposition coalition. INSET: Azmin (left) is seen as someone who can talk to all the parties and personalities concerned.



**Muhyiddin:** Slated to lead the new party.



**Anuar:** Pakatan Harapan welcomes new input.



**Shafie:** Likely to join forces with Dr Mahathir.

necessary about the new outfit but hinted there could also be a new coalition to replace the existing Pakatan Harapan.

However, Amanah secretary-general Anuar Tahir said that Dr Mahathir's proposal of a new coalition was just an idea for now.

"We will need to discuss it at our own party level and then at the level of the Pakatan Harapan leadership before anything happens. But Pakatan Harapan welcomes any party that shares our objectives," said Anuar.

Dr Mahathir's Citizens' Declaration campaign was fun while it lasted but it has fizzled out and the new party is his latest vehicle against Najib.

Well-known photo-journalist Minag Jinggo said Barisan Nasional leaders are making a mistake in brushing off Dr Mahathir's efforts as inconsequential.

"It will be a vehicle for Malays who might otherwise have voted for Umno," he said.

There are still many variables out there that are beyond the elder man's control but his group can provide the much-needed Malay representation to the opposition front.

Moreover, it is a party comprising an ex-Prime Minister, ex-Deputy Prime Minister, ex-Menteri Besar and ex-Minister. But they had better be prepared to work as equals alongside their new friends and not expect to be treated like VIPs.

It is hard to say at this point whether the new Malay party will be a magnet for votes from Umno members or merely cannibalise the Malay votes from PKR and Amanah.

Malay" in the sense that he understands the dos and don'ts of Malay culture. Yet, he is a modern and moderate Malay who, for instance, is not going to get hysterical at the sight of a Malay petting a dog.

Recently, when asked about PAS protesting against the Selena Gomez concert because of her sexy image, he amused everyone when he said: "Sexiness is God's work. There are people who are beautiful and there are those who are not. It's normal, don't get over-excited about it."

When told that PAS deems the concert disrespectful in the month Syawal, he said in his unflappable way: "All months must be respected."

He had managed to state his stand without being obnoxious or hurting anyone's feelings. Incidents like these will help ease the perception especially among the Chinese that he has the Umno DNA.

PAS and DAP cannot stand each other but Azmin can talk to the leaders of both parties. He enjoys a good working relationship with PAS hardliners like deputy president Datuk Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man and Mursyidul Am Datuk Dr Haron Din.

Recently, he managed to get the PAS assemblymen in Selangor to sign a memorandum committing their support for his administration.

On the day Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng was charged for corruption, Azmin who was in Mecca issued a heartfelt statement of support declaring his belief that the DAP leader was innocent of the charges and called him "my comrade".

Azmin will also have to be the bridge between Amanah and PAS if the opposition front wishes to avoid multi-corner fights in the general election.

He understands both sides of the political divide and is the natural choice in this warring period of Malaysian politics.

Dr Mahathir can be a testy character and there are bound to be problems when his new party is formed and steps onto the Pakatan Harapan stage.

The former Premier hogs the limelight wherever he goes and whatever he does but Azmin is the one to watch in the coming months. He seems to be in the right place at the right time.