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NEWS

The end of Dr M's era

FINALLY OVER: Two by-election victories sealed his and his supporters' fate



BY sacking suspended Umno deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and former Kedah menteri besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir from the party on Friday, Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has signalled that the era of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Umno and national politics is finally over.

Although Dr Mahathir, 91, stepped down in 2003, he continued to play an influential role in Umno and the nation's politics.

He helped to force Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to step down and helped Najib rise to power. But soon he was at his old game again.

After a year of attrition with Najib, Dr Mahathir latched on to the 1Malaysia Development Bhd issue and launched a concerted putsch

against Najib, aimed at toppling him as prime minister.

This time, he was willing to go to the extremes, even foolhardily, to achieve his aims.

He was willing to work with the opposition, with whom he had crossed swords for over five decades. He was even willing to cooperate with his archrival Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, as he roped in other top PKR leaders to his banner.

He even launched a "Save Malaysia" campaign with opposition and non-governmental organisation leaders, who had shamelessly agreed to work with him after calling him names a few years earlier.

He collected thousands of signatures from Malaysians and sought to see the king to pressure Najib to resign. Worse still, he managed to

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persuade Umno leaders to join him.

His son, Mukhriz, Muhyiddin and suspended Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal joined his cause enthusiastically, led to believe that Najib could be toppled and that they stood to get the lion's share of the spoils.

It came as a surprise that Muhyiddin was so easily persuaded to carry his banner. He was on the last leg of his long journey in Umno that had taken off when he was elected Pagoh member of parliament in 1978. As deputy president, he was just one rung away from the top prize of party president and prime minister, but unfortunately, that top prize was the hardest to reach.

Muhyiddin's rebellion started in July last year when he delivered a scathing speech at the Cheras Umno division meeting that BN was weighed down with scandals and would lose if a general election was called at that time.

Probably, he was right. Umno was facing uncertainties and people were asking, how long would Najib last?

Mukhriz was a greenhorn in the ways of Umno politics and reading



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the political pulse of the society. He had easily fallen for the astute scheming of his veteran father.

As for Shafie, I don't know what led him to fall for Dr Mahathir's schemes but he might have just saved his skin in the nick of time.

Umno is giving him a chance to show utmost loyalty or face the axe, if indeed, he has not irreparably damaged his career.

Dr Mahathir's putsch never had a chance to succeed simply because the people had bid him "goodbye" when he retired in 2003.

He should have bowed out gracefully then and enjoyed his retired years as an elder statesman.

Instead, he squandered away the goodwill he had accumulated over the years. In his old age, he might have been carried away by visions of invincibility and grandeur.

Patience is a hallmark of Najib's character as he climbed the Umno ladder. He had patiently weathered probably the biggest crisis of his political life when many in the Supreme

Council urged him to kill the Mahathir rebellion in Umno before it spread. But, he counselled patience.

Now, he has emerged much wiser and stronger, with the party's Supreme Council standing behind him.

His patience is indeed exemplary and the biggest reward was the twin victories in the Sungai Besar and Kuala Kangsar by-elections.

Dr Mahathir, too, made many mistakes. The worst was his alliance with the opposition and turning the two by-elections into a referendum on Najib.

In the end, a chastised Dr Mahathir said voters were influenced as they received *dedak* (animal feed).

He played himself into a corner by widening his attacks on Najib to cover the whole of Umno and BN, allowing both to rally behind Najib.

The by-election victories sealed Dr Mahathir's fate and the fate of those who supported him in Umno, allowing Najib to finally move against the main conspirators in the party.