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'3Ms' try to shake up Umno

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Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been pushing boundaries in Umno but people in Umno think he may have crashed through the fence in his latest moves against the Prime Minister.

JOHOR Journalists say they are seeing a side of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin they have not seen in all his years in politics.

The former Deputy Prime Minister has often come across as formal, reserved and oh, so serious. But his lighter side has begun to emerge now that the trappings of power are gone and he has tickled his various audiences with witty remarks, dramatic expressions and even some mimicking.

Muhyiddin has struggled for support since his sacking from the Cabinet but Johor is still a safe haven. There is quite a bit of sympathy for him especially in Pagoh where he is the Umno division chief.

The Umno ground in Pagoh is solidly with him going by warm and supportive reception when he officiated at a ceremony last week to mark the start of the AGM season for the 106 branches in the Pagoh division.

A few nights later, Muhyiddin and Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir were in Kota Tinggi for a ceramah where they spoke about their respective sackings and, of course, the 1MDB issue.

It has been a long fall from grace for the pair, and no one can quite tell what the future holds for them.

But it has been even tougher to second-guess Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The former premier has never been easy to read largely because he is notorious for keeping his own counsel but his actions in recent months have baffled even life-long Mahathir-watchers.

Many in Umno thought he had truly gone over the edge when he joined forces with DAP, PKR and NGO leaders to launch the Citizens' Declaration with the expressed aim of bringing down Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Today, he will share the stage with them to deliver a keynote address on their anti-Najib agenda.

But his recent lawsuit against Najib took the cake. Dr Mahathir and two others went to court to order Najib to pay RM2.6bil in exemplary damages to the Government for alleged misfeasance in public office.

It left many in Umno speechless.

"I don't understand him anymore. I know he has been pushing the boundaries but working with the opposition, suing the PM, he has gone beyond the boundary, he has crashed into the fence. I hope I don't meet him because I won't know what to say to him," said a Wanita Umno leader from Kedah who used to idolise him.

By now, it is possible that very few people in Umno believe Dr Mahathir is trying to strengthen Umno much less help the party survive beyond the next general election.

Mukhriz had told his ceramah audience in Johor that he wants to "save a burning house", but people in Umno think that his father is the one burning down the house.

Over and above that, they are confused, and they do not understand what Dr Mahathir is about anymore and some of them even imagine he is senile.

Dr Mahathir is 90 but he is far from senile. He has been looking quite robust of late and his campaign against Najib seems to have given him a new purpose in life.

His opposition to Najib was initially based on real issues like the crooked bridge, grants to prop up Proton and various other government policies. Along the way, it became muddled by new issues including the 1MDB.

But it has morphed into a very personal and obsessive crusade against Najib.

He has shifted the goal posts as he liked, changed the rules of the game and now he



Strange friends: Dr Mahathir's brand name is not what it used to be but he now has the backing his old nemesis Anwar.



Muhyiddin: He has joined forces with the opposition.



Sharkar: Angry that Dr Mahathir is working with the opposition.



Nur Jazlan: Worried about political undercurrents in Johor.



Mukhriz: Told people he wants to save a burning house.

wants to change the game altogether. To secure the support of the opposition parties and the NGOs, he has also agreed to their demand for institutional reform.

As a result, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim sent out a second missive asking people to support his former nemesis' endeavour.

Things have come full circle. The past will neither be forgotten or forgiven but the future is what matters, and Anwar and Dr Mahathir are finally in agreement.

Dr Mahathir recently posted an open letter urging the Umno branches which are about to start their AGMs to pass no-confidence resolutions against Najib.

Umno leaders immediately rubbishied it and several Umno leaders have urged members to ignore the provocation.

But branches in the Pagoh division are apparently preparing to go for it and, besides, they have received the go-ahead from no less than Muhyiddin.

There are 106 branches in Pagoh and according to division vice-chairman Datuk Dr Shahrudin Salleh, as many as 80% of the branches may pass resolutions against their party president.

Muhyiddin also told them that the Citizens' Declaration is entirely Dr Mahathir's work and denied that the opposition or NGOs had anything to do with it.

"Many of us in Pagoh have signed the declaration," said Dr Shahrudin.

There are some 28,000 Umno branches all over the country and there are bound to be several more branches outside of Pagoh, passing similar resolutions.

It will not shake Najib but it could embarrass him.

However, the 3Ms - Dr Mahathir, Muhyiddin and Mukhriz had better be

prepared for the pro-Najib branches to pass resolutions against them.

Temerloh division chief Datuk Sharkar Shamsudin pointed out that the division chiefs, deputy chiefs and vice-chiefs had convened their own gatherings to pledge support to their party president. They also rejected those conspiring with the opposition to topple Najib.

"It is sad that Dr Mahathir cannot accept that the majority in Umno is with Datuk Seri Najib," said Sharkar who is also a Pahang state exco member.

The branch AGM season started last week and will go on till May. There will be a lull as the Umno rank and file turn to more spiritual pursuits during Ramadan in June.

The divisional level AGMs will start in July, after Hari Raya. That will be when the big-time politics begin.

Power in Umno begins at the division level and there is going to be a wave of support for Najib's leadership from divisions all over.

Only Pagoh and perhaps Semporna, headed by Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, are expected to carry a no-confidence motion against Najib.

Mukhriz, who is the Jerlun division chief, may not be able to pull it off because his deputy chief and vice-chief are not with him. He has been in Kedah politics for close to two decades yet he seems unable to bring his party along with him.

Mukhriz's problem is that he is like a glamorous satellite that cannot land on the ground.

The impact of Muhyiddin's sacking from the Cabinet and suspension from his deputy president post has been nothing like when Mahathir sacked Anwar.

Pulai MP Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed, who

was then in Umno Youth, remembered the waves of anger everywhere he went.

"But we cannot take anything for granted. There are undercurrents, and I cannot figure out where it's going," said Nur Jazlan who is also Deputy Home Minister.

Nur Jazlan's apprehension has to do with the fact that his winning majority in Pulai plunged from more than 20,000 votes in 2008 to about 3,000 votes in 2013.

"I am very worried but I have not given up," he said.

The Umno fortress is not like what it used to be, and the concern is that the Muhyiddin factor may further erode the ground.

Joining forces with the opposition is turning out to be a double-edged sword for the 3Ms. It has alienated their traditional support base.

At the same time, it has brought them into contact with an audience that they did not have. For instance, Amanah politicians, who have failed to fire up the Malay ground, have been showing up at almost all of Muhyiddin's events, hoping to ride on the sympathy wave.

The problem for the 3Ms now is that very few in Umno can understand how working with the opposition to bring down Najib can possibly help Umno. The argument simply does not add up for them.

Even the avowed Mahathir supporter and Cheras division chief Datuk Seri Syed Ali Alhabshie draws the line against going with the opposition.

"I don't agree with Tun Mahathir sharing the same platform as people like Lim Kit Siang. I am a party man, I will never go there," he said.

The conclusion is that the man whom they once regarded as the greatest leader Umno will ever have is out to destroy their party because he wants to destroy one man.

"That's why all the opposition leaders are rushing to kiss his hands," said Sharkar.

The Citizens' Declaration has not caught fire. Some think it is because people are tired and fed-up of the non-stop politicking since 2008.

The younger people are disillusioned by the new politics which is little different from the old politics.

Most of all, no one is really convinced that the Citizens' Declaration can bring down Najib or bring about real reforms and a new Malaysia with a 90-year-old man as the leader.