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# Still trying to warm up

Still awkward and unsure but they could spell trouble for the ruling coalition even if they can't bring down Najib. *The Star - 28/3/2016*

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comment



DATUK Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail was a notable no-show at the inaugural gathering of the Citizens' Congress as the group spearheaded by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is now known.

She is not opposed to the group, but her support has been rather muted.

The PKR president was at a wedding reception and as two young PKR leaders escorted her to her car, they told her that Dr Mahathir was willing to meet her.

She merely smiled her famous Mona Lisa smile.

When pressed on whether she would be at the gathering, she murmured something along the lines that there was no need because the deputy president (Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali) would be there.

The lady they call Kak Wan is not ready to forgive or forget what Dr Mahathir did to her husband and especially the impact of his action on her children.

It did not matter that Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had given his whole-hearted support to his nemesis. Kak Wan is not budging as yet.

Her daughter Nurul Izzah also did not attend, although she had a programme nearby. Both mother and daughter have not signed the citizens' declaration.

Penang Chief Minister and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng was also absent, but he probably has a lot on his mind these days.

Yesterday's gathering was to formalise the coming together of a diverse group of people, some of whom until a while ago, were still at each other's throats.

For instance, everyone can still remember how DAP's Lim Kit Siang had smashed Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin for declaring that he is Malay first and Malaysian second. But yesterday, they were seated side-by-side on stage.

They are now united in their quest against Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and a regime change.

It is said that hate and love are two emotions on the same plane. But it looks like hate is the greater motivator in politics given the way it has brought together these assorted characters from both sides of the political divide.

They are still adjusting to each



**Rare gathering:** The allies mingle uncomfortably at the Citizens' Congress in Shah Alam.

other and their body language on stage were still awkward and unsure. Even their respective supporters were seated within their own comfort clusters, each group a stranger to the other.

PKR vice-president Rafizi Ramli put it best when he said he had never faced such a diverse and weird crowd.

Many of the speakers had to watch their mouth, so to speak. The Pakatan Harapan leaders were careful to direct their criticism at the Prime Minister and his wife.

They took care not to mention Umno, the party they most love to attack because two of those on stage, Muhyiddin and Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir, are still part of Umno even if they are in the *kumpulan terbuang* (discarded group), as Muhyiddin puts it.

All the past excesses of Dr Mahathir were also a no-go area and only Amanah president Mohamed Sabu dared attempt a few jabs, reminding the audience that Dr Mahathir had twice sent him to Kamunting under the ISA.

The Shah Alam gathering is a signal of more such collaboration to come in pressuring Najib to step

down. As to what they will do after that is still unclear. That is an area none of them want to go into at this point in time.

In the meantime, the group will try to build up momentum against Najib, Umno and Barisan Nasional until the general election.

"This is the beginning of a long journey," said Muhyiddin.

History does have a way of repeating. Muhyiddin is the second deputy prime minister to have joined forces with the Opposition against a sitting Prime Minister while Dr Mahathir is the third former prime minister to do so.

Dr Mahathir may be the biggest name in the Citizens' Congress, but the driving force was clearly the Pakatan Harapan people, going by the noise indicator.

The most deafening cheers were reserved for the Selangor Menteri Besar. His boys dominated inside and outside the hall, shouting "Reformasi" and "Bebas Anwar" (Free Anwar) when Muhyiddin arrived.

The young PKR members seated at the back of the hall looked like they enjoyed all the speeches, but they were not exactly swept away

by their new friends from Umno. They are a generation who have shed sweat and tears for their party and who see their counterparts in Umno Youth as soft and pampered.

Some of them thought that the young and well-spoken emcee, who declared that he used to admire Najib but was now calling for young people to rise up and protest, could afford to talk big because he had not been sprayed by tear gas or thrown into the lockup like them.

They were also amused and unimpressed to hear one of the Umno speakers putting up a fierce defence of DAP's Lim.

Their opinion is that the breakaway Umno group needs Pakatan Harapan more than the Opposition coalition needs them.

It was a successful coming-out party for the Citizens' Congress and a novelty to witness such a mixed bag of politicians on stage—enemies turned allies against a common foe.

It is the most fascinating marriage of convenience in years, but the overnight "lovebirds" are not to be under-estimated. They may not be able to bring down Najib, but they could be a catalyst for more trouble for the ruling coalition.