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Dr M willing to make concessions for political advantage

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NO one could have imagined that former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who sacked and later jailed his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in 1998, would one day wear a "Free Anwar Now" button and punch the air to cries of "reformasi".

But, that day came last Saturday at a Pakatan Harapan convention that was attended by Dr Mahathir and another sacked former deputy prime minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

They attended as chairman and president, respectively, of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), a party formed several months ago to specifically defeat Umno and topple Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

By wearing the Anwar button and raising his arms, Dr Mahathir has fundamentally repudiated his own position that he had consistently maintained since 1998.

He had made an about turn, one that has been in the making ever since his putsch against Najib failed last March.

Dr Mahathir had been sucked deeper into the opposition fold, with one desperate scheme after another, from the Dr Mahathir-Kit Siang Declaration, appealing to the Conference of Rulers to remove Najib, to forming PPBM to topple him.

As the popular phrase goes, he has turned into an opposition politician.

Dr Mahathir had always maintained that Anwar is morally unfit to succeed him because of alleged homosexuality and until several months ago, he was saying the same thing to the Australian media.

"This is the height of hypocrisy," said a political analyst.

"How can the man keep saying that Anwar is morally unfit for 18 years and then one fine morning, he goes to the Pakatan Harapan convention wearing a 'Free Anwar' button and punching the air for 'reformasi' with others?" he asked.

"Something is wrong with him and his former opponents.

"I don't blame Dr Mahathir because he relishes his new role as an opposition politician, but what of the others, who were always in the opposition and had been on the receiving end of Dr Mahathir's policies."

"Don't they have any self-respect? Don't they know what to support and what not to? Is political expediency the end of everything? Don't they have any fundamental beliefs?"

One cannot blame Dr Mahathir because he is willing to go to any lengths to achieve his political aims, including repeatedly repudiating

himself, in the hopes that he can generate enough political momentum to topple Umno and Najib.

He is willing not only to work with Anwar and his PKR party, but also with DAP and its veteran leader Lim Kit Siang, whom he had harassed and jailed several times under the Internal Security Act.

Lim, who had fought the "dictator Dr Mahathir" for close to three decades, is willing to embrace him even though the Chinese community is not all happy with DAP's participation with Dr Mahathir and PPBM.

Dr Mahathir's sole aim is to topple Najib, probably because he had failed in his putsch and had dragged his son, Mukhriz, into it along with Muhyiddin.

"Maybe he feels responsible for Mukhriz. What will happen to him if Dr Mahathir fails in his new objectives?" said a Barisan Nasional veteran.

"He must regret very much how it all has turned up, scattered like this.

"Dr Mahathir's Saturday escapade was in the making ever since he lost in his putsch against Najib, where he re-strategised and decided to sink his differences with Anwar and PKR, just to stay afloat."

Therefore, he made the journey to the High Court in September and shook hands with his nemesis because Najib had clearly checkmated him. He had to eat the humble pie and turn to his former rival, the very man he had derided repeatedly for well over two decades, and make his peace with Anwar.

It does not come as a surprise to take the handshake forward and wear the Anwar button and punch the air for him. These are small Dr Mahathir concessions for Anwar, his former ally, who is incarcerated on sodomy charge and is desperate to be freed.

"Anwar sees a ray of hope in Dr Mahathir... he is clutching at straws," said a former PKR leader.

"What are such small concessions for a political veteran like Dr Mahathir, who has twisted this way and that just to get a political upper hand. The opposition is reeling from losses it suffered after kicking out Pas. It is drifting aimlessly. Dr Mahathir is a godsend for them and they have rallied to him. But, they also hope to exploit his star power for their own political ends."

Dr Mahathir implored them to come together as one team using one symbol, one platform and one manifesto, but their weakness is that they can't fight as one team like BN.

Dr Mahathir is a consummate politician, but he might have met his match in Najib, who had bested him, forcing the former prime minister into one impulsive scheme after another that only catches the headlines, but does not advance the opposition cause.