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# Taking to the opposition stage

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's push to make Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin the opposition's Prime Minister candidate was premature because their new party does not have the numbers.

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It has been such a dramatic year for Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin - up there one day, out there the next day.

The former Deputy Prime Minister is moving around with a different crowd these days, rubbing shoulders with people whom he used to oppose and learning the ropes at being an opposition man.

He was recently in Pasir Gudang, Johor, where he was the main attraction for the "IMDB roadshow" or what the organisers gleefully termed as "Satu Malaysia Dalam Bencana" (Malaysia in crisis).

It was basically a PKR show because DAP is keeping its distance from the man whom they used to ridicule as, "Malay first and Malaysian second".

Going by his body language on stage, the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia president is still sizing up his newfound friends.

The opposition side has also been sizing him up because when the feisty PKR Wanita chief Zuraida Kamaruddin took to the stage, she mimicked how Muhyiddin would raise his hand to somewhere near his chest whenever they shouted "reformasi!". Everyone burst out laughing.

"Never mind, give him one more month and he will go like this," she said, punching the air above her head as she let out the PKR battle cry.

A month is too long in politics and when it was Muhyiddin's turn to speak, he lifted his hand high in the air and shouted "reformasi!".

It was the first time anyone had seen him do the "reformasi!" thing, it broke the ice and the crowd loved it.

Muhyiddin knows Johor like the back of his hand but Johoreans are seeing a new side to their one-time Menteri Besar.

He was such a wooden man when he was in power, he had this boring habit of droning on and on in a monotonous tone.

But there may be an orator behind that wooden mask. He seems less coiled up these days and he is getting the hang of what the opposition ceramah crowd is looking for - lots of Barisan Nasional bashing and a few jokes in between.

Muhyiddin was also the VIP guest at the first year anniversary of Amanah in Muar last week. The event was held at the riverine town's newest event hall which is owned by a wealthy Chinese businessman.

The Amanah leaders are still struggling to connect with the Malay ground and they were thrilled to see him. A few of them were practically dancing around him.

One year on, Amanah is still largely seen as a creation of DAP. They are desperate to break out of that mould and they see Muhyiddin as a lifeline to their hopes in Johor.

And that is why politics is the most entertaining show on earth.

Politicians are such chameleons. Just a year ago, the Pakatan Harapan parties were calling Muhyiddin a Malay ultra, a racist and running down his performance as the Education Minister.

Today, they are embracing him as the man who can help them capture Johor.

Muhyiddin, on his part, has gone from lauding Umno as the saviour of the Malays to condemning it as a party that, as he put it, is "rotten from the head to the tip of the tail".

But the greatest U-turn of all time has been the handshake between Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Johor is where Muhyiddin and his new party might have the most impact although some say that its usefulness is largely as a spoiler, to steal votes away from Umno and allow a third party to win.

Despite being the new kid on the block, a



All from Umno: A recent survey showed that Anwar was the Selangor people's choice for Prime Minister, with Dr Mahathir and Muhyiddin coming in a distant second and third.



**Redzuan:** His survey indicates Pakatan is on course to retain Selangor.



**Rafizi:** No single political party can get the Malay youth vote.

survey done in Selangor showed that Parti Pribumi had greater name recognition than Amanah, thanks to the star power of Dr Mahathir and Muhyiddin.

Unfortunately, their joint-star power could not quite convince Pakatan leaders that Muhyiddin is the ideal candidate for Prime Minister if the opposition takes over Putrajaya.

There has been an outright rejection of Muhyiddin by several Pakatan leaders who declared that Anwar remains their preferred choice.

Dr Mahathir had mooted Muhyiddin for the post during a talk in London and the rejection has been rather embarrassing for Muhyiddin. It was rather presumptuous of Dr Mahathir to lay claim to the coveted post given that Parti Pribumi is not even part of Pakatan.

Pakatan's endorsement of Anwar was vindicated a few days later when Institut Darul Ehsan released the results of its survey on Selangor.

According to the survey chief and Unisel vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Redzuan Othman, 30% of those surveyed picked Anwar, 24% named Dr Mahathir and 17% went for Muhyiddin.

The core business of Pakatan is demonising Umno, and it is ironic that they have to look to Umno for leadership.

Pakatan's squabble over the Prime Minister post is reminiscent to counting the

chickens before they are hatched. The coalition's chances of winning the general election has not looked this remote since 2013.

The expulsion of PAS meant losing access to voters in the Malay hinterland and they haven't the faintest clue how to win over Sabah and Sarawak.

These are the two biggest reasons why Pakatan cannot win the next general election.

At best, Pakatan will hold on to Selangor and Penang while PAS stands a good chance of retaining Kelantan.

Dr Redzuan's survey found that Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali enjoyed an approval rating of 58% and that PKR remains the party of choice in Selangor.

PKR vice-president Rafizi Ramli claimed that his own online survey indicated that no single political party can get the Malay youth vote which forms a big chunk of votes.

Rafizi did not provide any reason why this was so but said that it was premature to name the Prime Minister candidate when political support for the opposition remains uncertain.

It is obvious by now that the youth generation which was so fired up in the run-up to the last general election has once again grown disillusioned with politics and politicians. They are not inspired by Dr Mahathir's blasts from the past, he does not exactly represent hope and change for them.

Why is it necessary for the opposition coalition to have a Prime Minister candidate?

It is usually done to signal to the voters that they are ready to govern just as it is the norm for the opposition to have a shadow Cabinet. It is also to show a united front, a common purpose and a sense of solidarity.

The opposition, said a public affairs consultant, would have preferred to delay naming a candidate but Dr Mahathir's rush to push for Muhyiddin is a signal that he still wants things done his way.

"My reading is that he is still uncomfortable with Anwar. Both men are obviously still very ambitious, it's a calculated move to signal his intention," he said.

Dr Mahathir, added the consultant, is also implying that the opposition needs him and his party to deliver the Malay votes and, as a

reward, he wants his candidate as the Prime Minister.

Muhyiddin was once seen as a running mate to Anwar's aspirations for the Umno presidency. Their careers seem to mirror that of each other - sacked from their Deputy Prime Minister post, stripped of their party positions and then expelled from the party.

The one difference is that Muhyiddin is not sitting in jail or prohibited from contesting the next election. In that sense, Muhyiddin, unlike Anwar, is available to be called to duty.

But the parliamentary convention everywhere in the world is that the Prime Minister is nominated from the party or coalition that holds the majority in Parliament.

Dr Mahathir knows that very well, and it was quite cunning of him to propose someone from Parti Pribumi which currently has only one MP and one assemblyman. His party will have to win a convincing number of seats in the general election to make a serious claim for the post.

Negotiations over the distribution of seats to contest will be the big challenge.

A great deal of the bad blood between DAP leaders and Azmin can be traced back to their clashes over seats in the last two general elections. Azmin drives a hard bargain which drives DAP leaders up the wall. The discord over the Prime Minister post will pale when it comes to fighting over seats.

In the meantime, Muhyiddin is still battling the perception that he is a fair weather friend who may return to Umno when the situation changes. The Pakatan crowd is not convinced yet of his commitment to their cause.

Azmin has been helping him along, telling the ceramah crowd that when Anwar was sacked from the Cabinet, Muhyiddin was the first Umno leader who went to see Anwar because he wanted to hear for himself what had happened.

At each and every ceramah, Muhyiddin makes it a point to tell his audience that he is here to stay.

He has burnt his bridges with Umno but not everyone in Pakatan is ready to reach out to him yet.