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PRIME NEWS

Poser over Dr M courting Anwar

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'DESPERATE MOVE':
Ex-PM goes to High Court to 'show support' for Anwar's suit

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YESTERDAY'S unprecedented meeting between former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his long-time political enemy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has raised more questions than answers — is Dr Mahathir acting out of political expediency for his futile struggle?

Or is he trying to offer an olive branch and telling Anwar to forgive and forget for all his sins — sacking his former No. 2 and sending him to jail for sexual misconduct and abuse of power 18 years ago?

But, one thing was clear — Dr Mahathir did not turn up at the High Court as a mere spectator to Anwar's application on a case unrelated to Dr Mahathir.

He has other missions. He brought along top PKR leaders to the court in a bid to win over Anwar, the man he once despised, to rally for his, up-to-now, futile cause to oust Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak. He saw Anwar as the last saviour in his incessant political campaign after Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's new party making little inroads so far.

Umno treasurer Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak said Dr Mahathir's attendance in court yesterday did not come as a shock to him.

"This is what we would call political expediency. It just shows how desperate Dr Mahathir has become. Dr Mahathir knows that his new party, (Parti) Pribumi (Bersatu Malaysia), cannot go far on its own.

"So, he needs to latch on to Pakatan Harapan like a space shuttle

needs a rocket. That is why Dr Mahathir is trying to build a bridge with Anwar — so as to court Pakatan," he said yesterday.

Dr Mahathir made heads turn yesterday when he arrived at the High Court here to "show support" for Anwar's suit to strike down the National Security Council (NSC) Act 2015.

While in the court's public gallery, Anwar, under heavy escort by over a dozen prison officers, approached Dr Mahathir to shake his hand and both men had an exchange of words.

This was the first time the two politicians had met in 18 years after Dr Mahathir sacked Anwar as deputy prime minister on Sept 1, 1998.

Dr Mahathir, however, did not confirm or deny whether he was making peace with his long-time nemesis.

"I am interested in this case as it involves the security of the country. I have written about this on my blog and he is doing the same thing — trying to stop the act.

"So, I met him and had a long chat with him about what he's doing. I don't know about (being) friends. I talked to him, that's it. I endorse his actions against the NSC Act," said Dr Mahathir at the Kuala Lumpur Courts Complex here.

He claimed that his 20-minute discussion with Anwar at the court's witness room was centred solely on the NSC Act.

Responding to a question whether he believed Anwar was suited to become prime minister if the opposition came to power, Dr Mahathir said: "That is too soon (to say)."

The relationship between the two men started promisingly. Dr Mahathir enticed Anwar to join Umno in 1982, in a shock move to the latter's allies in Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia. He was fast-tracked through a range of cabinet portfolios and seemed poised to take over the helm of the country when Dr Mahathir would eventually step down.

But as the Asian financial crisis of 1997/98 gripped the nation, the two men's differences on how to handle the nation's economy started to come to boil.

Then came Anwar's first sodomy case in 1998, which resulted in Dr Mahathir sacking his erstwhile protégé.

Dr Mahathir alleged on Sept 22, 1998 that Anwar was unfit to become the prime minister and accused him of being a homosexual.

"I cannot accept a man who is a sodomist to become the leader of this country.

"I actually interviewed the people he sodomised, the women that he had sex with, the driver who brought the women to the place where he met them," Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying back then.

Dr Mahathir, who resigned from the leadership in 2003, repeated the allegation in September 2005 that he sacked Anwar, his one-time heir-apparent, to prevent Malaysia from having a homosexual leader.

"I cannot have a person who is like that... become the prime minister. Imagine having a gay prime minister. Nobody would be safe," Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying in 2005.

At the court, Anwar told reporters



Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (right) with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday.

that he and Dr Mahathir merely discussed problems related to the NSC Act and "other matters".

"It is not about trusting him (Dr Mahathir) or not. It is about giving whoever has a reform agenda a chance to continue (the struggle)," said Anwar, who is currently serving a five-year jail term for sodomy.

Anwar also expressed his appreciation for Dr Mahathir's willingness to support his application to seek a court order for an interim suspension of the act.

Anwar said Dr Mahathir wished him success and wished him well, adding that they would continue to engage in future discussions.

Anwar was later escorted to the court's witness room, where he was joined by Dr Mahathir, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali, and Anwar's wife and PKR president Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

In May, Anwar had warned PKR leaders against supporting the Ma-

hathir-Kit Siang declaration, which seeks to remove Najib from office.

He had said Dr Mahathir only sought to remove Najib, but was not committed to true institutional reform.

"I am more inclined not to be seen to be uniting with the declaration group, and to start to set a distance. Essentially, it remains Dr Mahathir's document — defective and incoherent viewed in the context of reform.

"Its only focus is the removal of Najib as prime minister due to the IMDB (IMalaysia Development Bhd) fiasco," Anwar had said.

Yesterday, the High Court was set to hear the application by Anwar to temporarily suspend the NSC Act, pending disposal of his legal action to permanently strike down the law.

The act has been criticised by the opposition and human rights organisations, which say it would give the prime minister sweeping powers. **Additional reporting by Hidir Reduan and Adrian Lai**



Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak

Salleh: Dr M needs Pakatan

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's attendance in court yesterday as a show of support to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is not really a shock nor a surprise.

Umno treasurer Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak said: "This is what we would call political expediency."

In a blog post yesterday, he said the meeting between Dr Mahathir and Anwar showed how desperate the former prime minister had become.

"(Dr) Mahathir knows that his new party, (Parti) Pribumi (Bersatu Malaysia), cannot go far on its own."

Salleh said this was the reason Dr Mahathir needed to latch on to Pakatan Harapan, like a space shuttle needed a rocket.

"That is why (Dr) Mahathir is trying to build a bridge with Anwar — so as to court Pakatan," he said.

Salleh said with the move, Dr Mahathir finally admitted that he did

not have the strength to make his new party a success.

"He needs to *tompong* (lean) on Anwar and Pakatan.

"And this is in spite of what (Dr) Mahathir and Anwar have been saying about each other for 18 years."

He said Dr Mahathir shaking Anwar's hand yesterday was similar to what happened in 1998 a day before Dr Mahathir destroyed Anwar.

"Mahathir's kiss is a kiss of death."