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Dr M's handshake with Anwar an act of desperation

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FORMER Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's sudden and unannounced trip to the High Court on Monday where he finally made peace with his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim must be seen as an act of sheer desperation by the 92-year-old political veteran.

Dr Mahathir realises that his Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Pribumi) and its protem president, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, are not making the desired headway among rural Malay voters.

The next best thing for him is to patch up with Anwar and exploit Anwar's supporters for his own ends.

The saying, "In politics there are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests", best describes this strange coming together of two former foes.

Although a bit trite, the saying remains relevant and aptly explains the rationale for the sudden get together of the sworn enemies.

Dr Mahathir, whose aim is to topple Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, is keen to make peace with Anwar because Anwar remains the de-facto opposition leader, even if he is in jail for sodomy.



Dr Mahathir cannot shape the grand coalition that he had mentioned earlier without making peace with the jailed opposition leader.

His Pribumi party lacks the network of supporters that Pakatan Harapan has. Little short of building his own network, which he has not, he has to rely on other networks that can effectively battle with Barisan Nasional.

Only the Pakatan Harapan network comes to mind because Pas has spurned him. Besides, PKR deputy president Datuk Seri Azmin Ali is a prime mover in Pakatan Harapan.

"Dr Mahathir is hitching a ride on Pakatan Harapan," Umno treasurer Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak said in a blog post. "Like a space shuttle does on a rocket booster."

He can only do this by climbing down from his perch and by making

peace with the man he has despised for so long as morally unfit to succeed him as prime minister.

To the question of whether he now supports Anwar as the prime ministerial candidate-in-waiting, Dr Mahathir simply said: "All that is too early to say."

Being an astute politician with his ears close to the ground, Dr Mahathir understands that politics is the art of the possible.

He has to make alliances with established opposition political parties, no matter how revolting that might be, to get his own agenda moving and give his own party, Pribumi, a fighting chance.

This is what political expediency is all about. It also shows how desperate Dr Mahathir has become to achieve his aim of toppling Najib.

He knows that he can't go far with Pribumi, with just a few ex-Umno men in it. He needs a mass-based political party or a coalition, like Pakatan Harapan, backing him.

"It is an admission by Dr Mahathir that he needs to build bridges with Anwar no matter how sickening that might be. He has to climb down from his perch and shake hands with his sworn enemy," said a Uni-

versiti Malaya political analyst who declined to be named.

"His meeting with Anwar is an admission that he does not really have the strength to make his party a success. He needs to take a ride on Pakatan Harapan," he said, explaining why Dr Mahathir went to the High Court on Monday and made peace with the man he had hated for so long.

It is a bitter pill for Dr Mahathir to swallow — making peace with his sworn enemy and to eat his own words that Anwar is morally unfit to become prime minister.

But Malaysians remain unconvinced and wonder whether anything positive can come out of this coming together of two aged rivals for power and influence.

Their time has long passed and younger leaders crowd the political stage.

Dr Mahathir is 92, and well past his prime, while Anwar will be 70 this time next year and is seen as a spent political force.

What might Anwar's response be to Dr Mahathir's initiative?

He is very responsive and loves the attention showered upon him and welcomes and even says Dr Ma-

hathir now supports his reform agenda.

As an incarcerated man, Anwar clutches at any straw, no matter how flimsy, that gives him hope that he could win big one day, taste freedom and gain vindication of the charges against him.

Dr Mahathir remains a factor in Malaysian politics, though with a diminishing appeal and whatever he does — like trying to topple Najib — will have an impact on opposition politics.

Anwar recognises that the Mahathir factor will have an impact on opposition politics, especially in the coming general election. It is one he cannot ignore and so he happily shakes Dr Mahathir's hand and hopes for the best.

Not friends nor enemies but permanent interest has brought the former sworn enemies together — sadly not honour or principle or ideology, but just permanent interest, which is to gang up against Najib.

Dr Mahathir's handshake with Anwar has given the flagging PKR a big shot in the arm, which it hopes to capitalise on and turn into nationwide political excitement. It remains to be seen how exciting it will be.