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Sorry seems to be the hardest word

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OBSTACLE: Political configuration has suddenly made Anwar more important to Dr M than ever before

TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad's plans for Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) to lead the grand opposition coalition to topple Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has hit an obstacle.

Before he can even embark on that journey, calls are mounting for him to first apologise to the family of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for sacking and jailing him in 1998.

PKR leaders, social activists and lately, Anwar's daughter, Nurul Nuha, 32, have been piling pressure on Dr Mahathir to apologise before even thinking of joining the opposition, let alone leading it in a grand coalition against Najib and Barisan Nasional.

An apology, they say, is a prerequisite before Dr Mahathir can even talk about the opposition and reforms in the same breath.

Nurul Nuha says an apology from Dr Mahathir is a must before any



meaningful cooperation can take place between his party and PKR or the Pakatan Harapan coalition.

But Dr Mahathir is hard pressed to offer one, considering that much of his political career is built on denying Anwar his right to hold high elected office.

Anwar, who was Dr Mahathir's deputy and heir apparent to succeed as prime minister, was unceremoniously sacked from the government and as Umno deputy president in 1998 for alleged abuse of power and sodomy.

Dr Mahathir had argued all these years that Anwar was "morally unfit" to hold office and, until as recently as June this year, he was repeating this same mantra to the Australian media in interviews.

But all that suddenly changed on Sept 5 when Dr Mahathir journeyed to see Anwar and shook his hands, hoping to end their enmity that had dominated national politics for nearly two decades.

Dr Mahathir had hoped to get his nascent PPBM moving on the path of reconciliation with Anwar's PKR

and Pakatan Harapan. Dr Mahathir was banking on using Pakatan Harapan, of which Anwar is de facto head, as a booster rocket for his PPBM.

He was hoping to also unite the disparate opposition under his wings with the aim of toppling Najib. However, Nurul Nuha, who spoke up on Wednesday, has thrown a spanner in the works.

She said Dr Mahathir had caused untold pain to Anwar and his family from 1998 onwards.

"As a daughter who has witnessed the countless torments my father went through in the past 18 years, my personal wish would be for Dr M to publicly apologise and admit the trumped-up charges.

"I think that would alleviate some of the hardships we went through as a family. It's not supposed to get easier, but you just need to get stronger," Nurul Nuha was quoted as saying by the Malay Mail news portal.

She even suggested that an apology from Dr Mahathir was a prerequisite before any alliance can be formed between PPBM and

PKR/Pakatan Harapan.

While political matters are well beyond Nurul Nuha's brief, the fact that she is the second daughter of Anwar and in charge of freeing her father, she also speaks for the family when she asked for an apology.



Tun Dr
Mahathir
Mohamad



Nurul Nuha
Anwar

And her family plays a big part in PKR affairs and, although incarcerated, Anwar has a big say in Pakatan Harapan matters, how it operates and with whom it forms alliances.

"Without Anwar's unqualified support for PPBM, it is really dead in the water," said a political analyst who is also a family friend of Anwar's.

"But to get Anwar's support, it is not enough to shake his hands. Dr Mahathir has to eat humble pie and admit he was wrong. He must apologise to his arch-rival."

Reconciliation is possible between politicians over matters political, but one is difficult for families who are caught up in the personal feuds between

politicians. "The hurt the family feels runs very deep and they had all suffered when Anwar fell from grace," the

political analyst said.

"An apology and suitable remorse from Dr Mahathir will go a long way to end the pain," he said. But will Dr Mahathir offer an open and unequivocal apology — that is the six million dollar question.

The one thing that is for sure is that political configuration has suddenly made Anwar more important to Dr Mahathir than ever before. But the demand for an apology has caught Dr Mahathir and his PPBM exposed and unprepared because without Anwar's consent and active support, Dr Mahathir's entire "grand coalition" plan would fall flat.

Anwar may accept PPBM but his family, some PKR leaders and activists will not. They see the issue as very personal.

"Only an open and unequivocal apology would assuage me and many like me," one PKR leader said.

"The pain we suffered from this man runs very deep."

But apologising now would mean going back on the reasons for putting Anwar away in the first place and not apologising would leave his party in desperate straits, leaving plans to topple Najib hanging in the balance.

Dr Mahathir, who needs Anwar's active support and endorsement, is indeed caught between a rock and a hard place.