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Dr Mahathir tries to call the shots

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is living in a bubble if he thinks that his new allies in Pakatan Harapan are going to put up with his plan for the prime minister to report to him and his party on government policies.

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TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad has finally said it out loud – the Pakatan Harapan candidate for prime minister is likely to be Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

It was unclear how Muhyiddin feels about being named as the prime minister candidate for the Opposition coalition but it must have made his day because that is the dream of most politicians.

What was clear though is that he is not Pakatan's choice because DAP publicity secretary Tony Pua immediately declared that Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is still the coalition's preference.

The PM candidate has long been a touchy topic for the Opposition and it looks like the struggle for the coveted job has begun even before the battle is won.

The endorsement of Muhyiddin, who is Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia president, came during a political talk by Dr Mahathir in London.

The former premier said what most people already suspected he had in mind. But what was shocking was his stand that the prime minister would have to consult his party and its chairman, who is none other than Dr Mahathir, on government policies.

He said this was to ensure that the prime minister does not make unilateral decisions.

It was quite bizarre and it basically meant that Dr Mahathir will be the de facto prime minister calling the shots from behind the scenes while his party will be some sort of secondary Cabinet vetting policy decisions.

It would also mean that Muhyiddin would be a lame duck prime minister who has to report to his party chairman.

Analysis
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It was little wonder that DAP's Pua shot it down and it was quite amazing that Dr Mahathir's sophisticated London audience took it all in without a murmur.

The politically correct answer would be that an important matter like this has to be decided by the Pakatan leadership.

Dr Mahathir did qualify himself by saying that the choice of Muhyiddin would depend on his party and also the coalition.

But the point is that his party is laying claim to the crown when it is not even an official member of Pakatan.

"My first instinct was that this man is into wishful thinking. He thinks he's a supremo, the master puppeteer who has put Lim Kit Siang and Azmin Ali in his pocket," said a Penang DAP politician.

Alternatively, said the same politician, Dr Mahathir might have been trying to give former deputy prime minister Muhyiddin a job in the arm, to make him take the lead.

"Muhyiddin has been relying on Mahathir to take charge. By naming him as the PM-in-waiting, he could be telling Muhyiddin to wake up from slumberland and take a leading role," said the politician.

The question of who will be prime minister has always been sensitive and contentious. In the run-up to the last general election, PAS had proposed its president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang over



Having his say: Dr Mahathir speaking to his audience at the University of London.

Anwar for the top job.

This time around, there is Selangor Menteri Besar and PKR deputy president Datuk Seri Azmin Ali waiting in the wings.

"If you put Azmin and Muhyiddin up there, people would place more hope on Azmin who is younger, more dynamic and has less baggage," said the DAP politician.

The bottom line is that the Pakatan folk do not regard Muhyiddin, 69, as PM material. Pakatan's embrace of the ex-Umno leaders was on the assumption that they would bring in the Malay votes and help them gain access to the Malay hinterland.

They complain that instead of coming up with a strategy and plan on how to engage the hinterland Malays, Parti Pribumi is talking about who will be prime minister.

Some think Dr Mahathir is being disrespectful to the Pakatan leader-

ship in jumping the gun.

But Dr Mahathir is just being Dr Mahathir, he does not need to *kowtow* to anyone. He probably believes that only he has the key to the gates of Putrajaya and he is doing Pakatan a favour by ganging up with them against Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

"He's got to realise that the world has changed, his era is over and he's no longer pulling the strings. His statement will cause more damage than move our programme forward," said the same DAP politician.

There is also some disconnect with the political reality out there and the perception is that Dr Mahathir's obsession to overthrow Najib is so overwhelming that it has affected his judgment and assessment.

But he is living in a bubble if he thinks that his new allies will put up with nonsense like having the

prime minister report to him and his party.

Pakatan leaders are beginning to understand that Dr Mahathir can be an asset as well as a liability. He is also becoming somewhat of an embarrassment.

His name carries clout and he brings star power to the coalition but he also comes with loads of baggage. Everywhere he goes, he has to answer questions about his past.

Even his son Datuk Seri Mukhriz has not been spared. When Mukhriz announced that Parti Pribumi wanted a two-term limit for the prime minister, people thought he should be the last person talking about that given that his father stayed on for 22 years.

When Pakatan leaders hooked up with Dr Mahathir, they did not realise they were riding the tiger. Now, they cannot get off or else they may be mauled.