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The Mahathir-Muhyiddin dynamic

The Pribumi leaders are complementing each other, not competing with each other.

PARTI Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia will be celebrating its first anniversary on Sept 9. When their first leadership line-up was announced, there were seven names. The top three are Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as chairman, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as president and Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir as deputy president.

Almost immediately, tongues started to wag about how the structure shows there is a tussle between "Mahathir's men" and "Muhyiddin's men".

This is understandable. Both are towering figures in our politics and both have their own followers.

Plus, the organisational structure chosen by Pribumi is also rather different from other parties. The existence of a chairman on top of a president is confusing to many.

But the constitution of Pribumi is clear about how the two roles are different.

The chairman chairs the Supreme Leadership Council, which is the highest executive body of the party. It consists of officials elected by the party's annual general assembly, plus others who are appointed by the president following consulta-

tion with the chairman. This is the main policy-making body in the party after the general assembly.

The president chairs the Presidential Council, which is the next highest structure in the party. It consists of the president, deputy president, the five vice-presidents, the secretary-general, the treasurer, the information chief and other appointed officials. This is the main body tasked with the operations and administration of the party.

Looking at the constitutional arrangement, the structure is really quite straightforward.

There shouldn't be any confusion because this is similar to any well-governed organisation.

The chairman and the CEO are two different people. The board and the management are two different teams as well.

But the criticisms go deeper than just the organisational structure. Many have said that the rivalry between the two figures has led to Muhyiddin being seen as having to stand behind Dr Mahathir.

In other words, the accusation is that Muhyiddin is not assertive enough, compared to Dr Mahathir.

This view keeps appearing in my

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conversations with politicians in various parts of the country, including in Muhyiddin's home state of Johor, as well as with observers from outside Malaysia.

This perception, too, is understandable. If we go by the events held by Pribumi on the whole, Dr Mahathir has been more visible than Muhyiddin.

Even in Johor, up to now, Dr Mahathir's events are more hyped up. And whenever people talk about Pribumi, most of them would say that it is Dr Mahathir's party.

By nature, Dr Mahathir has

always been the more aggressive one. This has been the case right from his first entry into politics. Even at the time he held no high positions in Umno, he did not hesitate to speak his mind.

Frankly, I find it illogical for anyone to compare Dr Mahathir to any other politician. He is a dominant and domineering figure, wherever he is. Comparing Muhyiddin, or anybody else for that matter, to Dr Mahathir will never work well for the other person.

And that is why it is wrong for anyone to judge Muhyiddin using Dr Mahathir as a benchmark. The correct benchmark, in the context of Pribumi today, would be how well he fulfils the role of a president of the party.

Pribumi today has a fully staffed and well-equipped national head office in Petaling Jaya.

More importantly, for a party that is only just turning one year old in three weeks, Muhyiddin has set up divisions in more than 145 parliamentary constituencies across the country. That is absolutely imperative to build a working party.

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ture. Muhyiddin knows it, and he has been working to build exactly that.

If they both try to do the same thing, or if Muhyiddin focuses too much on becoming what the public demands of him, Pribumi's machinery will never be built.

Last week, I had my first-ever one-to-one chat with Muhyiddin. I saw that he is a meticulous and methodical person, and was very thoughtful when answering my questions. I went into the room thinking I wanted to personally ask him why he was not as forceful as some people want him to be. But I came out of the room realising that I was using the wrong benchmark.

I had wanted him to compete with Dr Mahathir for public attention, but he knows that rivalry between them is not what his party needs.

He believes a complementary approach is much better. So far, he has proven himself right.

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