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pg. 15

The one with the strange bedfellows

'I'll be there for you, or you, or who's-best-for-me you' seems to be the theme song of the never-ending Malaysian political 'Friends' sitcom.

...friends, there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies, just permanent interest.

If, according to Perak DAP chairman Nga Kor Ming, Umno did not refuse to offer state executive council positions to the party, there would have been a possibility of the arch-rivals forming the state government.

Supposing the impossible happened – Umno and DAP in the same political bed to govern Perak – it would have been another episode in Malaysian politics where there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies.

But, for those cynically following the drama of the Perak crisis in which Umno was seeking partners to form the state government, they might say: In politics, it is not about permanent interest (not compromising with any practice of corruption and fraud) but self-interest (exco position).

DAP and Umno would have made strange bedfellow. Through the decades, DAP has demonised Umno as a corrupt party while the Malay-based party has accused it as a Chinese-based party that is anti-Malays.

And yet, DAP and its Pakatan Harapan allies were willing to go into a marriage of convenience with the party it denounced as led by kleptocrats.

It is also mind-boggling that Umno was flirting with the idea of getting in bed with a party it alleged to be pro-Chinese and abandon its perpaduan ummah (Malay unity) allies – Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia and PAS.

There are two theories behind Umno's outside-the-ummah (unity) – box thinking.

Theory one is that Umno was dallying with Pakatan to pressure Bersatu and PAS, which was playing hard to get, to form the Perak government.

Theory two is that there was a much more devious plot.

The state-level political crisis was to trigger a national fallout to shake the Perikatan Nasional federal government. For Umno, it might be a case of the enemy (Pakatan) of

my frenemy (Bersatu) is my friend.

The Umno/Pakatan marriage of convenience failed when Umno supreme council decided that the party should only partner Bersatu, PAS and Perikatan-friendly assemblymen in the new Perak government.

It shouldn't be shocking for Malaysians if arch-rivals DAP and Umno were to get in bed together in the future. We have seen how there are no permanent enemies in Malaysian politics.

Arguably, one of the biggest permanent-enemies-turn-permanent-friends shockers was when former Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim ganged up with adversaries such as DAP Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh. Anwar embraced them after the then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad sacked him from government and the party in 1998.

That's what we thought. Then came a bigger shocker – when Dr Mahathir buried the hatchet with Opposition leaders Lim, Anwar and Amanah president Mohamad Sabu.

Shocking because of the vitriol rhetoric these leaders had spewed against Dr Mahathir when he was Umno president. When he was in power, Dr Mahathir too had disparaged them.

But then again, we shouldn't have been shocked as in politics; there are no permanent friends, no permanent enemies but self-interest.

So, what about principles? Didn't



U-turn politicians: It was a shocker when 'frenemies' Dr Mahathir and Anwar decided to bury the hatchet and form an alliance for the last elections.

opposition leaders like Lim claim that Dr Mahathir's 22-year tenure as prime minister was when Malaysia first began to "rot", thanks to corruption and rampant power abuse?

Later, when they became political friends, Lim clarified that he had never accused Dr Mahathir

Mohamad of being corrupt.

For most of these U-turn politicians, the means justify the end – to gain power. They can always defend their means by saying they want to save Malaysians when, in fact, they were saving themselves.

However, in politics, there are also no permanent friends.

Even when Dr Mahathir ganged up with Anwar to bring down the then Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and the Barisan Nasional government, those who have been following the bitter rivalry between Dr Mahathir and Anwar knew that their political friendship will not be permanent.

Some predicted that once they achieved their goal, which was to be back in power, Dr Mahathir and Anwar would continue going at each other throat as they mutually distrusted each other.

After Pakatan won GE14 and formed the government, Dr Mahathir allegedly plotted to marginalise Anwar so that the PKR president won't replace him as Prime Minister. Anwar must have been wondering, "with friends (Dr Mahathir) like that, who needs enemies?"

Post GE-14, Malaysian politics has changed. There's no longer a strong party (Umno) to dominate its coalition partners. The situation is very fluid as there are no permanent enemies and permanent friends.

For example, Bersatu was a friend to PKR, DAP and Amanah in the Pakatan coalition. But it ditched them to be with enemies like Umno, PAS and Gabungan Parti Sarawak to form the Perikatan government.

In the led up to GE15, don't be shocked if enemies become friends and friends turn into enemies. Nothing is permanent when self-interest comes in the way.