

# Clear hints that PM has the numbers

Muhyiddin seems to have an early election in mind, according to those who attended a Perikatan Nasional leadership meeting in Putrajaya.

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Analysis by JOCELINE TAN

THE picture of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on the steps of the Prime Minister's official residence and surrounded by the top leaders of Perikatan Nasional was one of those pictures that spoke a thousand words.

The group of 14 leaders basically signalled that the Prime Minister has the numbers ahead of the July 13 Parliament sitting.

But some quipped that it was a picture that sent a thousand shivers through the spine of Muhyiddin's opponents. The group photo has been widely read as a show of strength and unity amid the ongoing numbers game between Perikatan and Pakatan Harapan.

One of the more significant faces in the picture is Sarawak Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg, who heads Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) that is being courted like a beautiful bride by the Opposition.

However, Abang Johari, who is also Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu president, has made it quite clear that he is with Muhyiddin.

He has refused to meet Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad or Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"We have had several Perikatan meetings but this was the most important because of the agreement on key matters related to the next general election," said a senior figure at the meeting.

According to the senior figure, the meeting reached a consensus that Muhyiddin will lead the coalition into the polls.

More importantly, the group unanimously endorsed Muhyiddin as their prime minister-designate.

"He will be the prime minister if Perikatan wins," said the leader.

This is a significant development given that Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, of which



**Mutual respect:** Muhyiddin (centre) and leaders of Perikatan taking a picture together at the PM's official residence in Putrajaya. — Bernama

Muhyiddin is president, is a small party compared to the big boys like Umno and PAS.

Another key agreement struck was to ensure one-to-one contests against the Opposition in the next general election.

Perikatan wants to avoid clashes among partners and a technical committee will be set up to work out the details on seat allocations.

"We intend to face the elections as the grand coalition," said the above leader.

Apart from the Prime Minister and Abang Johari, those at the meeting were government whip Datuk Seri Azmin Ali, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong and MIC president Tan Sri S. Vigneswaran.

Also there were Sarawak United Peoples' Party president Datuk Seri Dr Sim Kui Hian, Parti Rakyat Sarawak president Tan Sri Dr

James Masing, Progressive Democratic Party president Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah president Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, Parti Bersatu Sabah president Datuk Seri Dr Maximus Ongkili and Sabah STAR president Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan.

Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin, who has emerged as a powerful figure behind the curtain, attended in his capacity as Bersatu secretary-general.

It is understood that Muhyiddin, in his opening remarks to the meeting, stressed that he does not intend to make unilateral decisions.

He wants to engage and meet with his partners for discussions.

Although the meeting did not specifically focus on the Parliament sitting, Muhyiddin briefed them on the move to replace the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat.

It is understood that Datuk Azhar Azizan

Harun, currently the Election Commission chairman, is slated to replace Tan Sri Mohamad Ariff Md Yusof as the Speaker, while Pengerang MP Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said is expected to take over as Deputy Speaker from Teluk Intan MP Nga Kor Ming.

Muhyiddin informed the meeting that he has duly consulted the Attorney General's Chambers on the appointments and that it would be done according to the Federal Constitution.

The post-Covid-19 scenario remained the Prime Minister's priority and he briefed the meeting on the feedback received regarding the government's Penjana stimulus package.

The feedback has been positive and he stressed the need to continue to do more and that post-Covid-19 policies must stay dynamic to demands on the ground.

"It is no secret that the approval rating for the Prime Minister is very high. He is seen as a serious leader and a reliable pair of hands," said the above leader.

Although the focus of the two-hour meeting seemed to be on what is widely expected to be an early general election, the upcoming Parliament sitting will be seen as a test of Muhyiddin's strength.

In fact, it could be the first of many tests to come given that the opposition bench is the biggest ever in parliamentary history.

But Muhyiddin has something going for him and that is the deep division within the opposition bench which has been split over who should be their prime minister candidate. The Opposition's infighting has played into Muhyiddin's hands.

The Prime Minister is evidently very sure of the numbers, otherwise he would not be pressing ahead so confidently to put a new Speaker in the House.