

TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad has managed to look every inch the prime-minister-in-waiting that his hardcore supporters think he is.

He has been turning up for political meetings wearing his trademark bush-suits, looking like the boss and exuding confidence as though he is just a few more inches or, should we say, a few more MPs from reclaiming the job he chucked away three months ago.

"You wait and see. Tun Mahathir has the numbers to make it happen," said Bersatu supreme council member Akhramsyah Sanusi.

Oddly enough, not many people are buying into Pakatan Harapan's claim that it has 129 MPs on its side.

The reason is obvious.

If Pakatan really had that sort of numbers, Dr Mahathir would not be hanging around having meetings and calling press conferences.

He would be knocking on the palace door to present his credentials as the next prime minister.

There is an intense gamesmanship going on between both sides, with claims that so-and-so is going to jump only for it to be refuted as fake news minutes later.

The most bizarre rumour over the last couple of days is that a woman leader from Bersatu might follow another leader who is allegedly her husband out of Perikatan Nasional (Perikatan).

The intriguing part about the rumour was not the jumping prospect but the part that these two leaders had allegedly tied the knot not too long ago.

Speculation aside, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's government appears to be resting on a slippery slope.

Datuk Dr Shahrudin Md Salleh, until recently the Deputy Works

Can Muhyiddin survive the Mahathir onslaught?

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It is the last thing that anybody wants but a snap general election looms as the government appears to be holding on by a one-seat majority.

Minister, has as good as crossed over to Camp Mahathir despite claiming he is still with Perikatan.

The Sri Gading MP's exit means that Perikatan now has only 112 MPs in the 222-seat Parliament.

That is just one MP away from a hung Parliament and two MPs away from the collapse of the ruling coalition.

"Everyone is holding their breath. They call Mahathir a paper tiger but if they are not careful, he will eat them up like McD chicken nuggets," said photo-journalist Jinggo Minaq, a long-time Mahathir loyalist.

Dr Mahathir dealt a strategic blow to Muhyiddin because Dr Shahrudin was a Muhyiddin stalwart.

Muhyiddin had groomed him every step of the way - from political secretary to holding key posts in the Pagoh division before becoming an elected state assemblyman and finally an MP.

Muhyiddin also appointed him secretary-general after Bersatu was formed, but Shahrudin did not perform and was replaced.

Dr Mahathir needs only two more MPs to cross the floor for the government to fall but it is proving more difficult than he had imagined.

Datuk Seri Mohd Redzuan Md Yusof, who was said to be on the verge of joining Camp Mahathir, is staying put with Perikatan.

A member of Camp Mahathir claimed that Mohd Redzuan had even instructed his lawyer at a breakfast session last Friday to draw up a "water-tight statutory declaration" to sign.

Mohd Redzuan and Muhyiddin go back a long way and he would have been a big fish in Dr Mahathir's net.

The Special Functions Minister finally cleared the air yesterday during a press conference at his residence in Kajang and declared that he is with Muhyiddin.

However, Dr Mahathir is not the only one fishing for MPs.

A political insider said the Perikatan side has also been fishing and two MPs currently with PKR are ready to cross the floor.

One MP is from Johor and the other from Sarawak.

"We don't feel the need to let everyone know what we are up to but you will know at the next meeting of Parliament," said the insider.

Speculation that Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) is in talks with Dr Mahathir also seems unfounded.

"I am not aware of it but Mahathir should not assume that we are here to be bought.

"We don't want another political upheaval, we need stability so that business can recover and people can earn a living," said Sarawak's Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr James Masing.

Muhyiddin is playing it cool even if Dr Mahathir is giving him the jitters.

The Prime Minister announced a whopping RM35bil short-term stimulus package that had something for everyone yesterday.

He is also sending a message that he does not want to waste time on politics but is focused on bringing the country forward.

Dr Mahathir's bid to return to power will not go very far unless he is able to strike a deal with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar is said to have resisted meeting Dr Mahathir even though the elder man had offered to go to Anwar's Jalan Gasing office and even his Segambut home.

Anwar's absence at meetings between Dr Mahathir and Pakatan leaders also speaks volumes about the lack of trust for the former prime minister.

"Personally, I cannot accept Mahathir anymore and our president knows how we feel.

"But I am a party man, I will toe the party line," said an MP from PKR.

PKR leaders insist if they are to work with Dr Mahathir, Anwar must be named deputy prime minister.

"A definite transition date must be set," said the above MP.

Dr Mahathir needs to sort out the internal issues in Pakatan if he wants to entice more MPs from Perikatan to cross over because people would not want to leave a crumbling house for a house that is also in shambles.

Umno supreme council member Datuk Alwi Che Ahmad said Pakatan should not go too far in pushing Muhyiddin.

"He is the PM, he has the power of incumbency and he has the option of advising the King to dissolve Parliament.

"The people are not in the mood for a snap general election and those who cause it to happen will not do well," said Alwi.

The views expressed here are entirely the writer's own.