

No walk in the park for Dr M

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The political storm gathering over Sabah and speculation of elected representatives crossing the floor is bad news for Pakatan Harapan's bid to retake Putrajaya.

ANALYSIS by JOCELINE TAN

DATUK Seri Shafie Apdal is not known to lose his temper. He is famous for taking even the most difficult questions from reporters with a smile.

But the Sabah Chief Minister and Warisan president looked visibly angry on Thursday as he lashed at what he claimed were attempts to entice his assemblymen and MPs with money and posts. Shafie is an old hand when it comes to Sabah politics and he can sense that things are happening behind the scenes.

It is as if the furniture in the room is about to be rearranged and there may even be different people occupying the chairs.

Perhaps the most ominous sign of the gathering storm was the stunning acquittal of his arch-rival Tan Sri Musa Aman from a string of graft charges while Warisan vice-president Datuk Peter Anthony, who is a Shafie stalwart, was charged with money laundering.

Sabah, according to a Putrajaya political insider, will fall "very soon".

"It's at the execution stage," said the insider who is nicknamed "chief commando" in Perikatan Nasional.

Shafie's government is in grave danger and the changes in Sabah may happen within this month if the plan of the "chief commando" goes through.

Almost anything is possible in Sabah where politicians cross from one party to another the way they cross the road. Besides, Shafie's government was formed with crossovers from Barisan Nasional after the general election. And the irony is neither side of the political divide is in a position to condemn the other for the practice because both sides are elbow deep in it.

What Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin is allegedly doing to Sabah is a mini version of what Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is attempting to do to Muhyiddin's government in Putrajaya. Dr Mahathir will suffer a setback if Sabah goes the way of Kedah, Melaka, Perak and Johor.

As it is, the elder statesman is having trouble persuading Pakatan Harapan leaders to endorse him as the prime minister candidate.

During Tuesday's meeting of PH Plus, as the loose set-up of Pakatan, Dr Mahathir and Warisan is known, Shafie had argued strongly for Dr Mahathir to be anointed the prime minister candidate.

Shafie apparently has no problems with having Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as the No. 2 but wants Dr Mahathir as the No. 1.

He argued that Dr Mahathir was the only one who could get the support of MPs needed to boost Pakatan's numbers and to garner Malay support out there.

The Sabah leader's stand carries weight because he has nine MPs behind him and MPs are worth their weight in gold these days.

Dr Mahathir wants a third shot at the job and it is understood he only wants to be prime minister for six months, after which he intends to honour his promise to hand over to Anwar. However, Anwar is now the Opposition Leader and Pakatan's choice for prime minister.

"It's not a power struggle, it's about honouring the agreement. After Mahathir, it is now Anwar's turn. Our priority is also about drawing up a framework and agenda that meets the people's expectations," said PKR information chief Datuk Seri Shamsul Iskandar.

Those at the meetings were on the same page about reclaiming the people's mandate but they could not strike a consensus on the prime minister candidate.

It explained why the leaders emerged from the narrow side staircase of the PKR headquarters looking rather subdued and reluctant to speak to the media. The meeting was cordial and civil but it was apparent that Anwar and those around him do not quite trust Dr Mahathir after what has happened.

The two men keep saying they do not have issues with each other but, as they say, you cannot have two tigers on one hill.

The optics also suggested that Anwar is now in the driver's seat and intends to call the shots.

The fact that Dr Mahathir turned up at the PKR headquarters was reminiscent of the day he turned up in court to mend ties with Anwar back in 2016. The elder man is not afraid to eat humble pie if he thinks it will get him what he wants.

Dr Mahathir is famously strong-willed about getting what he wants. But he is now without a party and has only five MPs behind him.

He spent the public holiday last Monday cycling in Putrajaya. He maintains an amazing schedule for a man his age. However, his attempt to topple a third prime minister is akin to cycling uphill and far more challenging than expected.

His bigger enemy may not necessarily be Muhyiddin but time itself. Time is paramount in his comeback bid because Muhyiddin has the powers of incumbency and is in a better position to strengthen his position.

Several more MPs are expected to cross over to Muhyiddin and the domino effect may be unstoppable if Sabah falls. After that, it will be Negri Sembilan's turn.

With that, Pakatan's dream of returning to Putrajaya in the near future will be dashed.

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