

# Can PM survive royal displeasure?

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Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's government has been shaken by a constitutional crisis that has seen relations between the Palace and his Cabinet dip to a new low.

## Analysis by JOCELINE TAN

WHAT a roller-coaster week it has been in politics.

For a while, it seemed like it was game over for Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

But the Prime Minister is resisting political pressure for him to go even as public opinion is swaying towards the impression that his government has disrespected the King.

Political careers have crashed for lesser reasons and the manner by which Muhyiddin's government was censured by the palace is not good for his government.

Public confrontation is rare for the royals and some are puzzled that His Majesty had not sought a more discreet channel to convey his displeasure.

But it is probably an indication of just how brittle the relationship between the palace and the Prime Minister has become.

However, the royal reprimand was like a delicious musang king durian dropping onto the lap of Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim during the special sitting of Parliament.

Anwar seized the moment for all it was worth as the Pakatan Harapan bench erupted with cries

of "derhaka" (treason) and calls for Muhyiddin to step down.

The Opposition, which has weaponised the "kerajaan gagal" (failed government) mantra, went on overdrive with a new slogan - "kerajaan derhaka".

The palace missive was stunning enough to send Muhyiddin's inner circle rushing to his private residence for an emergency meeting on Thursday.

As the official vehicles of top ministers and the Attorney General began arriving at Muhyiddin's Bukit Damansara house, rumours swirled that he was ready to resign.

"There was no question of him resigning. I was at his house that afternoon, he was in good spirits. He believes he has gone about it the proper way.

"He recalled that when he was sworn in as Prime Minister, he took an oath in the name of Allah to protect, serve and give good advice to the King," said Bersatu deputy president Datuk Seri Ahmad Faizal Azumu.

Muhyiddin, in a press statement released late on Thursday, stressed that he has followed the law and procedures in annulling the Emergency Ordinances.

"I don't think he is trying to go head-on with the palace, that is not

his intention. He wants to set the record straight that his Cabinet acted with due process," said a Selangor businessman.

De facto Law Minister Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan, the man who sparked off the furore, has offered to take responsibility.

Takiyuddin, who is also PAS secretary-general, has also informed his party president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang of his intention to resign.

But it is learnt that Hadi told Takiyuddin it was for the Prime Minister to decide.

PAS is not taking the "derhaka" accusations lightly. There has been a damaging backlash on social media and police reports have been lodged against Takiyuddin.

It took the party decades to dispel the perception that it had republican tendencies and to show that it is a loyal subject of the King.

Party sources suggested there are moves for the top brass of Bersatu, Umno and PAS to seek an audience with the King to smooth things over.

"The Opposition was against the Emergency, the Malay Rulers wanted it to end and the government has taken the step of revoking Emergency Ordinances.

"So how is it that three parties which are basically in agreement to

end the Emergency end up quarrelling over it?" said Ahmad Faizal.

The devil lies in the details. The King had specifically asked that the Emergency Ordinances be tabled for debate in Parliament.

"I think the King wanted a larger dialogue on the Emergency which had been controversial from the start," said Deputy Dewan Rakyat Speaker Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said.

But things spiralled out of control when Takiyuddin, provoked by the Opposition bench, revealed that the Cabinet had already revoked the ordinances and all hell broke loose.

It was evident the government wished to avoid a vote if the ordinances were tabled for debate. Unfortunately, the palace took it as a snub.

The political crisis is taking place as the King marked a quiet birthday as the Sultan of Pahang on Friday.

Muhyiddin conveyed greetings to the sovereign on social media but relations between the two men, which began on such a sunny note, is near breaking point.

Can Muhyiddin withstand the pressure to step down?

It ought to be pointed out that while the King has the power to appoint whoever has the support of Parliament as prime minister, he

cannot remove a sitting prime minister.

But there is so much pressure coming from Pakatan and also Umno.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak is having a field day taunting the government with jibes like, "failed in the fight against Covid, now fighting with the palace".

"We only want to change the captain. We are not trying to change the ship," said Umno supreme council member Datuk Seri Sharkar Shamsuddin, who is from Pahang.

Pakatan, on the other hand, is out to change the captain and the ship.

"It won't be difficult to bring down the government but it will be difficult for anyone to form the next government. Whoever takes over will have the same problems as Muhyiddin.

"And if there is a general election, I am not even sure there will be a real winner," said political commentator Khaw Veon Szu.

The final day of the special Parliament sitting has been postponed, thus averting what would have been a fierce showdown.

But the storm will rage on beyond Parliament.

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