

Does Muhyiddin have the numbers?

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ANALYSIS by JOCELINE TAN

TAN Sri Muhyiddin Yassin is turning out to be the proverbial cat with nine lives.

As his car glided past the Istana Negara gates at around 11am yesterday, many thought he would be handing in his resignation as Prime Minister to the King.

But the man is a fighter and he managed to pull a few more rabbits out of the hat during his audience with the King.

He is not stepping down just yet. He informed the Yang di-Pertuan Agong that he still commands the majority and that he would put it to the test in a vote of confidence when Parliament convenes next month.

Events had unfolded at break-neck speed over the previous 24 hours, but the man at the centre of it all has remained quite unflappable, even stoic.

Muhyiddin is no stranger to crises. He played a major role in bringing down Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi before out-manoeuvring Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to claim the top job.

But his voice hardened a little during his live TV telecast when he lashed out at the notorious "Kluster Mahkamah" (Court Cluster), the group of Umno politicians facing graft charges and

As both sides argue over majority support, one thing is clear: If Muhyiddin has to go, he will go down fighting.

whom he knows are the masterminds behind Umno's agenda to pull out support.

He warned that he will not meddle in the court cases involving these politicians. It was like giving the green light for the courts to decide as they see fit.

The 11 MPs who withdrew their support have basically derailed Muhyiddin's government.

However, an announcement of numbers is one thing. Claims of numbers still have to be legitimised by putting it to the vote in Parliament or by statutory declarations (SDs).

Muhyiddin's majority in Parliament has been one of the best-kept secrets in politics.

The only time when it was put to the test was during the Budget session last year when he managed to secure 111 votes for one of the Bills.

"People called him a mouse, they said he was afraid to face Parliament with the numbers.

"Well, he is taking up the challenge.

"The government side will table a vote of confidence motion to settle the matter once and for all.

"We pray for his success and the country," said Kelantan Bersatu chief Datuk Kamaruddin Md Nor.

"They said he was afraid to face Parliament with the numbers. Well, he is taking up the challenge."

Datuk Kamaruddin Mohd Nor

Muhyiddin chose to make his big announcement flanked by his ministers.

It was almost a mirror image of the press conference on Tuesday by Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who was flanked by key Umno leaders, including Tan Sri Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Najib.

It was powerful optics for both men except that one picture depicted a fierce and strategic Opposition party, while the other depicted the powers of incumbency, that whoever holds the reins in Putrajaya calls the shots.

It is unclear what transpired during the royal audience, but Muhyiddin must have convinced His Majesty on the proposed confidence vote in Parliament.

It is the constitutional and transparent way to test the support of the leader because SDs have been so badly misused by almost every political party.

If Muhyiddin has to go, he will go down fighting.

A vote in Parliament also saves the Palace the trouble of having to establish which man or which side has the numbers.

The Palace would not have to go through that messy process that followed the "Sheraton Move" early last year.

It has also become quite common for politicians to sign SDs for opposing sides, basically reducing the significance of the SD to the value of toilet paper: useful and yet dispensable with a flush.

For instance, some of the Umno MPs who signed in support of Muhyiddin had also signed against him, while a few had also signed to support PKR president and Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

However, the parliamentary vote

still spells danger for Muhyiddin and his government.

Pakatan Harapan leaders are insisting that Parliament should convene immediately for the vote of confidence.

Text messages have been flying about which side has more numbers.

It is no secret that both sides of the divide are claiming to have the support of Warisan and Pejuang after Datuk Seri Shafie Apal and Dr Mahathir joined the Pakatan protest against the postponement of the sitting of Parliament.

The pair also want Muhyiddin to step down, but they do not necessarily support Anwar for the premiership.

Pakatan leaders are also actively wooing Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), which has a solid bloc of 18 MPs. The courtship has been so aggressive that Sarawak Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Openg is said to have switched off his handphone.

Muhyiddin has bought himself some time but so much damage has been done to him.

The impending showdown in Parliament will decide which side has the numbers but it will probably bring more instability and uncertainty for the country.

The views expressed here are the writer's own.