

# Pressure mounts on Muhyiddin

The Prime Minister is standing on a slippery slope as pressure mounts for him to resign, mooted mainly by Ahmad Zahid who himself is on shaky ground.

The Star - 11/7/2021  
pg. 11

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THERE has been so much ridicule and attacks levelled at Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, with some coming from as far away as France.

His fellow Perakian and Padang Rengas MP Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz has continued to bash him from Paris, where he is with his wife and son, berating the Umno president as a "loser".

But Nazri may have missed the mark. Ahmad Zahid's latest move against the government – or more specifically, the Prime Minister – is by far the most damaging to date.

The Umno supreme council's decision to withdraw support for Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin raises the question whether he still has the numbers to remain as the Prime Minister.

It was serious enough for Muhyiddin and his inner circle to confer with Attorney General Tan Sri Idrus Harun the following morning.

The Attorney General has advised the Prime Minister that his executive power is intact because only parliamentarians can determine whether Muhyiddin still commands a majority in Parliament. A statement from a political party does not carry the same legal weight.

Legal eagles have also weighed in

on whether this equates to a loss of confidence in the Prime Minister.

Alternatively, some say the Prime Minister could also turn to statutory declarations of support from MPs as proof that he commands the numbers.

Muhyiddin is standing on a slippery slope and his latest dilemma has made news from Tokyo to New Delhi and as far away as Washington DC.

Umno has lit the spark to a potential constitutional crisis which can only be settled by a headcount in Parliament.

But Parliament is not exactly a safe place for the Prime Minister, given that Umno has given its MPs the green light to vote as they choose in Parliament.

Umno MPs are free to support or go against Muhyiddin in the event of a showdown.

"I don't think anything like this has ever happened in our history. The country is in a constant state of confusion," said former law minister and Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia election chairman Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar.

Ahmad Zahid has turned out to be relentless. He is haunted by his ongoing corruption trial and it is evident he is going for broke.

"The party is divided because of one man. The president has made

the party so weak and divided," said former Putrajaya division deputy chief Datuk Tun Faizal Ismail Aziz.

The decision to pull the plug, as Ahmad Zahid puts it, has split the Umno hierarchy, especially among the party's MPs.

He has support among the supreme council members but his own MPs appear to have trust issues with him.

The majority of the MPs are standing by Muhyiddin but if they are not careful, they will be seen as siding with the enemy given the anti-Bersatu sentiment in Umno.

Dr Faizal Tajuddin, the vice-head of Umno's Pasir Salak division, said many Umno MPs are reluctant to see the government collapse at this point in time.

"They are concerned about the backlash. People are suffering. They don't want to be blamed for causing more instability.

"Timing is important if we want to pull out support. The Umno grassroots want an immediate pullout but I personally feel it should happen only after the return of normal governance," he said.

Titiwangsa Umno chief Datuk Seri Johari Ghani said Ahmad Zahid is not aiming to replace Muhyiddin.

"He wants to detach our party from the 'kerajaan gagal' (failed government). They had one-and-a-

half years to tackle the pandemic but cases are still rising, there are white flags flying and we hear of people jumping from buildings.

"We cannot keep doing the same thing and expect different results. Muhyiddin is on shaky ground," said Johari.

It is easy to ask a prime minister to step down but do those calling for his resignation have a plan for what happens next? Without a plan it would be like jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

"No matter who takes over, the people are angry. Give us someone who listens and who is able to work," said Pengerang MP Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said.

Her constituency, which is dependent on tourism, is badly hit.

"Other countries are opening up, we are still locked down. People out there feel that politicians are only looking out for themselves.

"They take pictures of every little thing they do for the people when it is part of their job, when they should be doing more. They have no shame," said Azalina.

Umno apparently has this notion of an interim prime minister who can turn the focus away from politics to the pandemic.

The person they have in mind is none other than the Kelantan prince Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

It is understood that Tengku Razaleigh, 84, does not intend to contest in the next general election.

The plan is that he will be in charge for six to nine months to bring the pandemic under control, after which he will advise the King to dissolve Parliament for a general election.

The Gua Musang MP has long been regarded as an aspirant for the top job.

There is an urban legend going around that a famous fortune teller in Petaling Jaya had predicted Tengku Razaleigh would one day become prime minister – but only after a few tries.

Getting to be the prime minister is tough, but recent history has shown that it is even tougher to hold on to the job. And honestly, can Malaysia's problems be solved by a politician whose career began in the 1960s?

The Umno thorn in Muhyiddin's side is now at its sharpest and most dangerous.

But do not write off Muhyiddin just yet. He may still be able to hold sway over a minority government simply because the opposition bench does not have the numbers to take over.

The views expressed here are the writer's own.