

# More should ride into the sunset

Analysis by JOCELINE TAN

NOT many people thought they would ever see Lim Kit Siang and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad riding off into the sunset.

Well, it has finally happened or, at least, it looks like a sunset scene.

Both men, whose careers began in the 1960s, have indicated that they would not be contesting the next general election.

But there was a caveat of sorts to their retirement - they are giving up electoral politics while still having a role in their respective parties.

Dr Mahathir is still Parti Pejuang Tanah Air chairman while Kit Siang announced a complete retirement from party and electoral politics at the start of the DAP national congress, only to accept the party mentor post at the close of the congress.

The pair are gazing out towards the sunset, but their horses are not exactly trotting towards the horizon.

The Chinese media was not impressed and had summed up Kit Siang's retirement as: "He left the house in the morning but returned at night."

Dr Mahathir's retirement announcement drew a far less cynical reaction because it is evident that his health will hold him back.

He was more of a spectator during the Johor election, looking frail and had problems completing his sentences in one breath.

"No one is indispensable, but we are grateful as long as he wants to stay on as our party chairman. He can play a guiding role and he has recently started chairing meetings

## Two big political figures recently called it a day, and this should be a signal for those who have overstayed to come down from the stage.

again," said Pejuang research director Akhramsyah Sanusi.

It is nevertheless a major development in Malaysian politics.

"So much of our political discourse is fixated around the personal conflict and vendetta of men like them.

"These two have been big political personalities for more than half a century. They come with so much baggage, with their complicated relationships that make it difficult to move forward," said political economy consultant Khoo Kay Peng.

Khoo said DAP, which has been moulded by Kit Siang since its inception, is a classic example of how a "personality is embedded in the party.

Dr Mahathir left on a high note the first time he decided to retire. But tragically, his second retirement is happening at the lowest point of his career.

His legacy is in question; the Chinese dislike him while those in Umno feel that he betrayed them. On top of all that, Pejuang lost its deposit in every single seat contested in the Johor election.

"His time has passed, it's time to rest and reflect. I believe he is finally saying goodbye. His role at the forefront is done.

"He should make a clean cut. As long as he has a position in his



**Long record:** Dr Mahathir and Kit Siang's political career started in the 1960s.

party, members will refer to him, decisions made will be attributed to him," said former minister Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar.

Kit Siang's exit comes at a point when his party's appeal among the Chinese base is on the decline and its leaders are often scolded on social media.

He has been a tremendous political bulwark and his retirement would have won all-round sympathy and goodwill for the party had he not accepted the party mentor post.

"In Kit Siang's case, the problem is less about his mentor role than too many family members at the leadership level," said Syed Hamid, referring to Lim Guan Eng and his sister Senator Lim Hui Ying.

The debut of Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (Muda), a youth party featuring young leaders in their 20s, has underscored the

fact that many current leaders have overstayed.

"People who have been there for decades, that generation has to go soon," said Khoo.

He said they include Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Tan Sri Abdul Hadi Awang and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, all of whom are 74.

Age may be just a number, but they have been in politics for around 40 years.

According to Syed Hamid, Datuk Seri Najib Razak who, compared to the others, is a "youthful 68", should also take a rest if he wants to help his party.

"My advice to him is don't try to come back. All of them should take a rest so that their parties can rejuvenate for the future," said Syed Hamid.

Najib is a case study of how ironic politics is. The former premier is drowning in legal troubles but is getting rave receptions wherever he goes.

On Friday, he was in Penang where the Chinese NGOs welcomed him with clashing cymbals and lion dances and people were elbowing each other for a glimpse of him.

Abdul Hadi, who has been PAS president since 2002, is perhaps the one most in need of a good rest.

He has serious health problems and looks 10 years older than Anwar.

Abdul Hadi only managed to travel to Qatar in his capacity as Special Envoy to the Middle East where he made news for the wrong reasons after meeting with a representative of the Taliban.

There has been speculation that he is not welcome in Saudi Arabia because of his alleged association with Islamist groups frowned upon by the Saudi government

For instance, he ought to have been there with Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Idris Ahmad, who was in Saudi Arabia to discuss pilgrimage quotas.

But no one in PAS would dare tell him to retire, not even those critical of his decision to hold hands with Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia instead of Umno.

Political leaders come and go, but it is a different story when one is also a religious leader.

The late PAS spiritual leader Datuk Seri Haron Din, who had heart problems and attended meetings with an oxygen cylinder on standby, used to say that religious leaders have to lead till the day they die.

"There has been a huge generational shift in politics with the automatic entry of young voters. Society is ready to recognise them as adults and give them a say in what they want the country to become," said Khoo.

That should be the signal that it is time for those who have overstayed to come down from the stage.

The views expressed here are the writer's own.