

Will the PM go a full term?

Analysis by JOCELINE TAN

IT was the day the earth moved, yet its anniversary has passed without fanfare.

Neither the victors nor losers of the 2018 general election on May 9 bothered to mark the day that changed the country's political landscape.

The losers still feel humiliated by the memory. As for the winners, they are now the losers and there's not much to celebrate.

However, Umno, which had been like the *Titanic* sailing towards an iceberg, has managed to turn the ship around and this could not be more evident than at the party's extraordinary general meeting last week.

Another political hurdle was cleared after the EGM approved amendments to the Umno constitution to allow the party the option of holding its election six months after the general election.

Party elections are always problematic for Umno and it can now focus on the general election.

Will the amendment get the green light from the Registrar of Societies, which answers to Home Minister Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainuddin, and who is seen as the most dangerous man in Putrajaya?

The Umno side seems hopeful especially after seeing how Hamzah and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi embraced like long-lost brothers at a recent Hari Raya open house.

Moreover, the constitutional

The stage is set for Ismail Sabri to call for elections this year, yet there are lingering doubts he will go for it.

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amendment, which was proposed by vice-president Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin, was seconded by no less than Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

"It gave a strong signal that the PM is committed to what the party wants," said former Kapar division chief Datuk Faizal Abdullah.

In short, it means the general election will happen this year.

The EGM ended on a high note for many Umno leaders, and during the party's Hari Raya open house, Ahmad Zahid made a big show of feeding the Prime Minister a piece of kuih.

There were tensions between the two men, but all seems rosy for the

moment while the divide between the Putrajaya cluster and PWTC cluster has also narrowed.

"There has been so much discussion on when the PM should call for election. It should be when our party is ready and not when the Opposition is ready," said supreme council member Datuk Seri Sharkar Shamsudin.

The popular opinion in Umno is that the Prime Minister is likely to dissolve Parliament in October after the budget session, and on the heels of what is expected to be a sweetheart budget riding on the high oil prices.

The stage is set for poster boy Ismail Sabri to make the biggest decision of his political career.

So why are there still suspicions in Umno circles that he wants to go a full term? This despite him making it loud and clear that he is a party man and will listen to the party.

Apparently, the circle around him is still not totally assured that the poster boy will actually get the job after what happened over the mentri besar post in Johor.

However, state and parliamentary dynamics can be quite different.

History has shown that the Sultans have near absolute say over the choice of mentris besar, but it is still very much about numbers at the parliamentary level.

In 2018, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong at that time only consented to an audience with Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail who was then PKR president and leader of Pakatan Harapan, which won the elections using the PKR emblem.

It is known that the King had offered her the premiership, but the lady has principles and she presented Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's name for prime minister.

In the event of Barisan Nasional winning the general election, Ahmad Zahid, as its chairman, will be the one to present the prime minister nominee to the King.

"I am confident our party will honour the commitment to the poster boy," said Sharkar, who is also a Pahang exco member.

Some have pointed out that Ismail Sabri should not have any problems with the palace because of the "Pahang factor" and as long as he has the numbers to form the government.

Doubts about Ismail Sabri's intentions also stem from the perception that he is too close to Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin who wants to be consulted on the election date and whose coalition is against early polls.

Ismail Sabri also did not help the situation with some of his recent statements.

He told *Berita Harian* the election

date will not be determined by what happened at the Umno EGM and he needs to discuss it with his Cabinet.

That ruffled feathers in his party because it is the Prime Minister and not the Cabinet who decides on when to call for election.

Ismail Sabri has lost weight and seems overwhelmed at times, but Lady Luck has smiled so sweetly on him since he landed in the hot seat.

There is a feel-good mood in the air with Covid-19 cases subsiding, the economy restarting and the reopening of international borders.

Social media has been swamped with stories of Malaysians delighted to be able to balik kampung for the first time in two years and even the horrible highway traffic drew less grumbling than usual.

But good moods come and go and there are always new road bumps around the corner in politics.

For instance, the optics from Ismail Sabri's trip to Washington DC where Asean leaders met the American president were fantastic.

However, he was upstaged by Indonesian President Joko Widodo, who proceeded to Texas to meet up with Elon Musk, the man who is changing the world.

Politics is full of the unexpected and that is why Ismail Sabri has to strike at the right time. The fact remains that he is a backdoor prime minister and stretching out the borrowed mandate would be a mistake.

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