

No end to Dr M's feud with PMX

Bitterness, deep wounds and resentment live on. 'It's like they are destined to make life miserable for each other.'

FOR the second time in his political career, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is about to take someone to court, and that someone is no less than PMX, Malaysia's 10th Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Dr Mahathir used to take pride in not suing anyone no matter what they said about him, but that record has finally been broken twice in quick succession: he has also sued Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

His lawyer has sent a letter of demand asking Anwar to retract claims made about the wealth of Dr Mahathir and his family. Another prime minister will be heading to court if the case goes ahead.

The decades-long feud between these two gigantic personalities is still on, or as a banker put it: "It's like they are destined to make life miserable for each other."

After all these years, there is still so much suspicion and distrust between them.

There will always be a residue of bitterness on the part of Anwar and his family over what he went through.

"The wounds run deep and the memories are painful for Anwar," said ISIS (Institute of Strategic and International Studies) senior fellow Eddin Khoo.

On Dr Mahathir's part, there is



Analysis

probably resentment and even a measure of envy at the role reversal.

The former premier had spent much of his career trying to stop Anwar, and it can't be easy for Dr Mahathir to see Anwar at the pinnacle.

"Everyone thought they had patched up after 2018, but that was naive, and I never believed any of it. Now it will only get worse," said lawyer Khaw Veon Szu.

"I don't blame Anwar if he still feels hurt. This type of feud tends to carry on to the next generation."

Anwar is certainly not taking any chances when it comes to Dr Mahathir, especially after the way he was cheated of the succession during Pakatan Harapan's 22 months in power previously.

He has already fired a warning shot at Tun Daim Zainuddin, the

man who played a key role in his fall from grace in 1998: There is an investigation, based on the Pandora Papers, probing the former strongman's alleged offshore accounts.

Anwar's attacks on Dr Mahathir's family is also to signal that he will not hesitate to look into the enormous wealth of the elder politician's children, and which is now the basis of the pending lawsuit by Dr Mahathir.

Those around the Prime Minister think that Dr Mahathir's lament about the plight of the Malays is aimed at undermining Anwar and to cast aspersions on the legitimacy of the unity government.

Some even suspect that Dr Mahathir is out to bring down yet another prime minister.

The potential lawsuit against Anwar is also perceived as part of a grand scheme to topple Anwar.

"I don't think he is trying to do that. His attacks on Anwar started only after the government blocked the Malay gathering that Mahathir was to speak at. Anwar had prodded the old lion and the lion is fighting back," said Akhramsyah Sanusi, a Mahathir loyalist and head of Pejuang's research bureau.

Dr Mahathir, said Akhramsyah, is aware of his limitations after his health scare early last year, and has to use a chair when praying these

days - however, that did not stop him from having another go in the last general elections.

"The dangerous thing about Mahathir is that despite having overstayed, there are Malays who still hold him close to their heart.

"Anwar should take care not to insult him but it would be a mistake to keep an elegant silence. He has to be very crafty and tactical in dealing with Mahathir," said Khoo.

To understand Dr Mahathir, said Khoo is to understand that he expected those who came after him to continue with his policies and vision, and when they did not, it became problematic for everyone.

Every prime minister who came after him has come under attack.

Fortunately for Anwar, Dr Mahathir is much more frail than he was when he set out to undo Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

It is doubtful he will ever get over how he was ousted in Langkawi, but that has not deterred him, and he is set to be the next president of Putra, the ultra-Malay party associated with Datuk Ibrahim Ali.

Politically, he has gone from a high to the depths, an outcast among the Chinese and rejected by Malays, especially those in Umno who see him as the destroyer of their party.

He is also not the best person to

talk about the future of the Malays. He is simply too old, rather out of touch, and young Malays in their 20s and 30s have moved on to new heroes.

So what lies ahead for these two political giants?

"Time is not Mahathir's side, he is running against the clock and has nothing to lose.

"Expect him to get more outrageous and to go for broke," said political commentator Ivanpal S. Grewal.

At the same time, said Ivanpal, Dr Mahathir knows he cannot match the powers of the Prime Minister.

"Another go in the coming elections? That would be disastrous. I see him doing what he does best - agitating from outside and forcing the government to react.

"It is also about remaining relevant and ensuring that he continues to be part of the national conversation," he said.

Ivanpal, who is a child of the Mahathir era, said the animosity will never end and that there will be more colourful remarks made by Dr Mahathir against his nemesis.

"The most effective way for the PM to hold off Mahathir, or any other would-be detractor, is to fix the economy. Do a great job on the economic front and that will shut everyone up," said Ivanpal.