

Najib's son to contest in Langkawi?

The island which was once Dr Mahathir's golden child is now a political chessboard as one dynasty crumbles and another inches forward.

NO ONE likes to lose - especially if you were once, or rather twice, the most powerful man in the country.

And it seems like Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has yet to get over the way Langkawi voters showed him the door in the 15th General Election (GE15) last November.

His return to Langkawi last weekend was reportedly his first since GE15. He attended a wedding kenduri and later in the evening, an appreciation dinner at the Goldsands Hotel where he described his defeat as "jatuh merudum" - a crushing fall.

It was a terrible way to go but that is what happens when one refuses to read the writing on the wall.

On the morning of Nov 19, 2022, moments before he left the Ombak Villa, where he usually stays on the island, to cast his ballot in Alor Setar, he had asked a journalist about his chances.

"His face changed, he looked grumpy when I told him that it did not look good for him," said the journalist.

Dr Mahathir had been demonised by the Chinese after the fall of the Pakatan Harapan government in 2020 and losing his deposit in Langkawi equated to a rejection by the Malay base. He is at rock bottom.

"The people did not throw him



Analysis

out. He is like our uncle, we want him to take a rest," said Kedah assembly Speaker Datuk Juhari Bulat.

Dr Mahathir has made too many enemies and some of them are out for revenge or, at the very least, some kind of political vindication.

For instance, Datuk Seri Najib Razak's son from his first marriage, Datuk Nazifuddin Najib, has been registered as an Umno Youth member in Langkawi for about three years.

Langkawi is a long way from the family's political base in Pekan and it is unlikely that Nazifuddin, 39, moved north on a whim.

Nazifuddin is often said to have a rebellious streak compared with his elder brother Mohd Nizar who is now a state assemblyman in Pahang and their younger sister Puteri Norlisa who is a practising lawyer.

Najib's children from both marriages have strong opinions about Dr Mahathir and according to local political chatter, the younger man was hoping to avenge what Dr Mahathir had done to his father in the recent general election.

It did not happen because Najib probably thought Dr Mahathir was still invincible in Langkawi and a defeat for Nazifuddin would be equated to a defeat for Najib.

Speculation about Nazifuddin among Umno circles in Kedah has since moved on to the state election.

Kedah Umno is grasping at straws to survive the state polls. The party up north is populated by mediocre warlords, none of whom can hold a candle to Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor.

Sanusi has such a big personality and ordinary Kedahans relate well to his witty and provincial oratory. He is also gutsy and is unafraid to lash out, be it at Umno leaders or a certain Crown Prince.

Kedah Umno is looking for some sort of "X factor" to avoid another wipe-out.

And now that Dr Mahathir's mythical hold over the island has been debunked, the two state seats in Langkawi - Kuah and Ayer Hangat - are anyone's game.

"Langkawi needs new blood. It's

time for an overhaul," said former Ayer Hangat assemblyman Datuk Mohd Rawi Abdul Hamid.

About a fortnight ago, Nazifuddin, who presents himself as Nazif Najib, announced he was offering himself for the post of vice-Umno Youth leader in the party election next month.

It is a significant move considering that he is basically a political novice who is not known for his views or stand on party politics. In fact, nobody really knows what he is about except for his family ties.

But the coming Umno election is a wide open race and, besides, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has opened the floodgates for family politics and nepotistic practices.

When contacted for a comment, Nazifuddin's response was: "I'm not making any comment on Langkawi atm (at the moment)".

There is also a leadership vacuum in the Langkawi division following the sudden death of the incumbent division head Datuk Nawawi Ahmad and there has been some effort to propose Nazifuddin for the post.

Nazifuddin would have to contest against two better known names, that is the incumbent deputy division chief Nor Saidi Nanyan and Datuk Armishah Siraj, a former senior government servant

who contested and lost in the general election.

Najib's long-time political secretary Datuk Ghazali Ibrahim was sent to seek Najib's opinion when he turned up for his court hearing earlier last week.

But, again, Najib felt that his son was not ready for the rough and tumble of Umno's divisional politics.

Instead, Nazifuddin is likely to contest the division's Youth leadership and Langkawi's politics could get interesting if he wins.

"Tun Mahathir's defeat is not a reflection of how Langkawi people feel about him. I campaigned there in the final week, nobody expected the Malay tsunami," said Akhramsyah Sanusi, a Mahathir loyalist and head of Pejuang's research bureau.

Dynastic politics exist in every society, but it is ironic that Langkawi is witnessing the end of one family's hold over Kedah's politics and what might be the start of another family's bid for vindication.

Langkawi, once Dr Mahathir's golden child, will have to learn to stand on its own two feet and watch on as politicians turn it into a political chessboard.

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