

The gloves come off for Anwar

The corruption trial of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin will play out in the court of law as well as the court of public opinion.

EVENTS over the last few days have happened at lightning speed for Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

He arrived at the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) complex on Thursday morning to be questioned, he was arrested in the afternoon and charged in court the next day.

His supporters were outraged and those who turned up at the High Court on Friday unfurled banners and held up posters accusing the authorities of malicious intent and political prosecution.

So much has changed, and yet some things do not change.

There is a new government, but the old Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad playbook seems to linger on.

Muhyiddin is the second former prime minister to face charges of money laundering and abuse of power.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has just passed his 100-day milestone and the gloves have come off.

Anwar made an impassioned speech in Parliament, urging people to take into account the facts and evidence before accusing his government of selective persecution, of which he has been a victim.

The net had been closing in on Bersatu leaders but few expected it to pull in such a big fish.

"Everyone has underestimated Anwar. He is willing to make hard decisions and this includes holding people in high positions accountable," said political commentator Ivanpal S. Grewal.

But the optics are not good and Anwar will need to manage the perception that he is trying to cripple Bersatu ahead of the six-state elections.

"The word out there is that the politics of vindictiveness is alive and kicking," said Ivanpal.

Malaysia is a nation divided.

No single coalition won in the general election last November and events in recent days will deepen the divide instead of healing it.

But as some have pointed out, there is only a small window from now until the state polls and the unity



Analysis

government aims to inflict maximum damage on Perikatan Nasional to stop the green wave.

Anwar does have a killer instinct.

He had earlier reopened the investigation into the Pandora Papers and MACC is reportedly probing a former finance minister over his alleged financial interests in 12 offshore companies.

The former minister, now aged 84, was rumoured to be Tun Daim Zainuddin, who was a key figure behind Anwar's 1998 downfall.

Muhyiddin's trial will take centre stage in the coming months and there will be repercussions on both sides of the political divide.

Perikatan will not be able to get on the high horse and preach about corruption and integrity now that it has its own court cluster.

While this will have a limited effect on the rural Malay heartland, it will affect the urban, middle-class Malays and the civil servants in Selangor, who are the target of the next green wave.

The urban Malay populace keeps up to date on current affairs and may re-evaluate their political sentiments.

On the other hand, Anwar's command of the moral high ground somewhat eroded after he teamed up with Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Umno to form the government.

"Can Bersatu withstand the pressure on its top leadership or will it galvanise the party like what happened in PKR when Anwar was persecuted?" said Ivanpal.

The cohesiveness of Perikatan will be tested in the coming months.

"Muhyiddin has become a rallying point, this has brought our party clo-

ser together. It is a serious case of selective prosecution when you target the former PM on the Jana Wibawa programme but dare not touch the former finance minister," said Bersatu deputy president Datuk Seri Ahmad Faizal Azumu.

Ahmad Faizal claimed that his friends in Umno had called to say they were against "politik dendam" (politics of revenge).

Minutes after Muhyiddin emerged from the MACC complex on Thursday night, he was whizzed off to the PAS headquarters in Taman Melewar in Gombak Selangor, where PAS supporters had gathered for prayers and for a ceramah on the theme of "Solidariti Menentang Kezaliman" (Solidarity Against Tyranny).

The crowd was waiting to hear from the horse's mouth and Muhyiddin did not disappoint.

The Perikatan chairman elaborated on what he went through with the MACC, defended himself and those who were counting noted that he mentioned former finance minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz at least 20 times.

Muhyiddin clearly felt that Tengku Zafrul had thrown him under the bus and he is probably preparing to return the favour.

"PAS is preparing to weaponise the issue in the court of public opinion," said Ivanpal.

The corruption crackdown has damaged Bersatu, but it has also given Perikatan a golden opportunity to play the victim and accuse the other side of using the instruments of the state against it.

Anwar is determined to survive a full term.

He will do what it takes to hold on to Selangor in the state polls or else his government will be on a slippery slope.

He had a relatively smooth transition from Opposition leader to Prime Minister and he has shown that he can stand up there to defend himself and his government.

But he will now be facing an Opposition that is on a war footing.

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