

Will Muhyiddin's career crash?

WHO would have thought that a much-repeated story about how he ought to have been prime minister a second time could have landed Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin in such hot water.

What Muhyiddin said on a dimly-lit *ceramah* stage during the Nenggi by-election campaign has drawn a stunning rebuke from the Pahang palace and could result in possible sedition charges.

Bersatu supreme council member Dr Afif Bahardin said his party president was merely relating a factual chronology of the messy situation after the 2022 general election when every party was scrambling to claim the numbers to form the government.

But as some have pointed out, it was the suggestion that the then Yang di-Pertuan Agong, who is the Sultan of Pahang, had taken sides that has likely upset the Pahang palace.

"The way it came out at the *ceramah*, it was a little snarky," said a Klang Valley-based lawyer who had watched the video of the *ceramah*.

Very few politicians have emerged unscathed when they clash with the palace. The political careers of some have died on the spot.

The monarchy remains an immensely powerful institution even if social media commentary suggests that the royals are not venerated the same way as many years ago. Those living in the gilded cage have not been spared the social media scrutiny.

What Muhyiddin said struck a raw nerve within the Pahang palace, going by the tone of Tengku Mahkota Tengku Hassanah

This is not the first time the former PM has clashed with the palace, but the latest collision has hurt his party and could end his political journey.

Ibrahim Alam Shah's statement calling on the police to "take strict action".

The prince used words like "manipulative", "harmful" and "dangerous" to describe Muhyiddin's action and equated it to "inciting distrust in the royal institution".

It looks like Muhyiddin is in serious trouble. Dozens of police reports have been lodged, especially by politicians from Pahang.

Pahang assembly speaker Datuk Seri Mohd Sharkar Shamsudin led the charge in urging all the assemblymen in the state to defend their Sultan.

"We take this very seriously. Every single Umno division in Pahang has also lodged police reports," said Sharkar.

Things took an awkward turn when PAS deputy president Datuk Seri Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man joined the fray in asking the police to conduct a "fair investigation" into the allegations against Muhyiddin.

Tuan Ibrahim is squeezed between a rock and a hard place, having to defend his sovereign without forsaking Muhyiddin, who is Perikatan Nasional chairman.

The Cheka assemblyman has enjoyed warm ties with the palace since his days as a lecturer when he was often invited to give religious talks to the royal circle. The Sultan as well as the Crown Prince can often be seen



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embracing Tuan Ibrahim whenever they meet.

"This has not gone well for Bersatu, which wants to replace Umno as the defender of all things Malay and that includes standing by the Malay rulers," said an aide to a former minister.

Pahang was seen as the next state to fall to Perikatan but, said the same aide, "I can't see the green wave happening there after this."

Muhyiddin has never quite got over not being picked for the top job after the 2022 general election. It has been like a rash that refuses to go away.

The issue ought to be water under the bridge by now, but he keeps scratching at the rash and repeating the narrative that he had statutory declarations of support from 115 MPs.

Some have poked holes at the list saying that the Umno MPs on the list would have been penalised and lost their seats under the anti-hopping law. Then again, going by the argument of the cur-

rent Dewan Rakyat Speaker, declaring support for the leader of another party is not considered party-hopping.

But what Muhyiddin has going for him is that many Malays who voted for Perikatan agree with him. The unity government was not well-accepted by many Malays who refer to it as "kerajaan titah Agong", that is, a government formed by royal command.

"Tuanku had presided over three prime ministers in the aftermath of the 14th General Election - three prime ministers in the first three years of his reign. His intention was political stability through a grand coalition," said political commentator Ivanpal S. Grewal.

Those familiar with Muhyiddin say it is his character not to give in when he believes he is in the right. Some call it conviction, others say he can be terribly stubborn. It is hard to change his mind once it is made up and especially if it concerns principles.

A former political secretary to a minister saw how he once told off then prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak at a meeting.

"When Najib asked Muhyiddin for his opinion, he told Najib there was no point in him saying anything, that Najib never listened to him. Minutes later, he walked out of the meeting," said the former political secretary.

Ties between Muhyiddin and Najib had, by then, hit rock bot-

tom over the 1MDB scandal and he was sacked from Umno a week later.

So many questions are dangling in the air in the wake of the latest controversy.

Has the fracas with the Pahang palace reduced Bersatu to the weak link in Perikatan?

Will it accelerate Bersatu's succession plan? Is it time for PAS to assume the chairmanship of Perikatan?

Bringing charges against Muhyiddin could open a Pandora's box of sorts, unleashing information that some people would prefer not to be made public.

Bersatu information chief Datuk Razali Idris has also implied there could be up to 115 witnesses called to testified if there is a court case. It will be an 'ah-ha' moment to finally confirm the identities of the reportedly 15 Barisan Nasional MPs who signed statutory declarations supporting Muhyiddin for the premiership.

Umno has had more than its share of ups and downs with the Malay rulers.

Umno supreme council member Datuk Seri Alwi Che Ahmad often tells his friends that the royal institution is like fire.

"They can light up our world and keep us warm. But you go too close, the fire may burn you. Stay too far away, it will be dark, cold and problematic. You want to survive in politics, you have to learn how far or how near to go," said Alwi.

Has Muhyiddin strayed too far from the flame? Can he get closer to the light again?

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