



It's just politics

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THIS is the tale of two former prime ministers each claiming to have the support of 115 Members of Parliament.

Perikatan Nasional chairman Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin claimed to be holding 115 statutory declarations (SDs) from MPs supporting him for PM after the 2022 General Election.

Flashback to 2020, when Muhyiddin versus then Perikatan Nasional chairman Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the PM post after the latter unexpectedly quit Pakatan Harapan. Dr Mahathir issued a list of 115 MPs backing him for the top post.

The 115 - more than the 112 required to control the 222-seat Parliament - claim is insufficient for an MP to be appointed PM, as SDs and lists are just claims. And anyway, an MP who signed an SD in favour of one name could simply change his/her mind and support someone else.

We know that SDs must be followed by real support. Otherwise, they remain a piece of paper that the King will not act upon.

We also know that a list can change. For example, Dr Mahathir's list was reduced to 113 when two MPs disavowed their support for him.

This brings back memories of a phone call I received on March 1, 2020. A businessman with links

Claims of support don't always work



Numbers game: Two former prime ministers, Dr Mahathir (left) and Muhyiddin, both tried their hands at counting statutory declarations as a show of support but it didn't quite work. — Filepic/The Star/Sin Chew

Politicians shouldn't depend too much on statutory declarations and lists because this is Malaysia - numbers can change in hours.

to Muhyiddin wanted to know whether MPs I knew were still with Dr Mahathir or had switched to Muhyiddin.

One MP told me that he retained his original SD for TM (Tun Mahathir) and had yet to sign a new SD for MY (Muhyiddin).

"Need to be consistent. Can't simply follow the wind, bah. Also fearful of PAS for Sabah," he told me.

(What happened next? I'll tell you later.)

We know how the tale of two 115 MP claims ended.

Despite the Langkawi MP providing a list of 115 MPs, the King named Muhyiddin prime minister in 2020.

(Back to the MP I wrote about

who, for the sake of Sabahans, was worried about PAS: After Muhyiddin was sworn in as PM, the MP switched sides and was given a big post. The moral of the story is that most politicians go with the wind.)

Fast forward to 2022, and really, Muhyiddin should have learnt from that previous experience.

But the Pagoh MP thought that, with SDs from 115 MPs, he was guaranteed the PM post for the second time.

I, too, thought Muhyiddin would have been made PM. My MP friends were telling me who they supported. They told me that so and so (who would be made a Senator) would be Tourism Minister. They gave me insider stories on who was meet-

ing Muhyiddin and the deals made to form a Perikatan-led government.

It was an open secret that coalitions like Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), with 23 MPs, and Gabungan Rakyat Sabah, with six MPs, supported Muhyiddin at that time. Google it.

However, deals collapsed after MPs got wind that the King wanted a unity government.

On April 23, 2023, months after Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim became Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof of GPS revealed that initially, the Sarawak-based coalition supported Muhyiddin for PM. But, Fadillah said, it acceded to the King's wish to form a unity government for the country's stability.

MPs I know switched their support from Muhyiddin to Anwar because either they went with the wind, as it was clear that the latter would be PM, or their constituents were against their decision to support a government with PAS as the backbone.

Knowing them, their support for Muhyiddin as PM was gone with the wind once the Bersatu president was out of the running.

The politician who was supposed to be Tourism Minister switched as soon as he saw where the wind was blowing. However, he did not become a minister in Anwar's Cabinet.

When discussing why Muhyiddin failed to become PM for the second time, my favourite words to use are "arrogant and overconfident". He was overconfident about the 115 SDs that he had and was arrogant not to strategise a Plan B or Plan C in case his Plan A failed.

This week, I had coffee with a political strategist and a veteran journalist. The strategist told me that the words to explain Muhyiddin's failure to become PM are "arrogant and ignorant".

"He was ignorant about history," he said as we discussed how delays can buy time to sabotage a politician's chance to be made PM.

When I reviewed the timeline of events leading to Muhyiddin's failure despite being a forerunner in the PM race and Anwar's victory, I was reminded of a deadline that was delayed.

The Perikatan chairman was supposed to present his SDs from MPs to the King on Nov 21, two days after the 2022 General Election. Istana Negara had issued a statement that the King had given coalitions and political parties a deadline of 2pm on Nov 21 to form a government and present a candidate for prime minister.

However, the King extended the 2pm deadline to the next day.

"Muhyiddin was ignorant that there was a possibility that there would be a delay, and he lost momentum to push for himself to be made PM," said the strategist.

The Perikatan chairman made several blunders after the 2pm deadline was extended, blowing his chances.

In the tale of two MPs and 115 SDs and lists, the lesson to learn is to factor in that the numbers can change. And they can't be taken too seriously.