

Dubai Move - for real or a mirage?

DID the Dubai Move have something to do with what is known as the silly season?

The silly season in the United Kingdom is the summer months when the media is full of frivolous news because most Brits, including politicians, go on their summer holidays.

Malaysian politicians were also on their end-of-year break last month with a number of them flying to the Middle East, some to perform the umrah and some apparently to holiday in Dubai.

"Dubai is the new London for the Malay elite. They used to head for London but Dubai is now the Malay elite's preferred go-to," said an aide to a former minister.

Malaysia's silly season would have been a welcome lull after a year of non-stop politics. Instead, along came the Dubai Move or what appeared to be a conspiracy to topple Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and bring down his unity government.

There have been various versions of what it was about and the people associated with it. Essentially, these political personalities were supposed to have met in Dubai to put the scheme in motion.

Unlike the Sheraton Move, where those pushing for the change in government gathered at the Sheraton Hotel in Petaling Jaya in a show of numbers, the Dubai Move was vague and mysterious, without a visible ring-leader or a clear narrative.

Was there an actual plot? Did the schemers gather in Dubai to plot and organise? Who were they? What kind of numbers did

The alleged conspiracy to topple the government, which was denied by some and confirmed by others, has been the most intriguing rumour in recent times.



JOCELINE TAN

Analysis

they have to undo the unity government?

So many questions and so few answers.

Pontian MP Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan said it best when he described it as a "fata morgana" or a mirage which looks real but is an optical illusion.

The dust has yet to settle on the Dubai Move, but a plausible explanation is emerging.

It is no secret that Perikatan Nasional has not given up trying to take over Putrajaya. Its intention, which was widely floated in the Malay social media, began to take the shape of a plot as the year drew to a close and especially after political leaders began commenting on it.

Was it psywar or mind games on the part of Perikatan leaders? If that was so, it rattled those in power and captured the imagination of the chattering class.

Some thought it to be a case of

"wag the dog," the political lexicon referring to an attempt to divert public attention away from issues and problems in the government.

"There is no evidence that anything happened. So many leaders have denied meeting or even being in Dubai," said a lawyer close to the top Umno leadership.

One of those implicated was Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, who denied he was in Dubai. He said he flew straight home after performing the umrah and had bumped into Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi in Mecca.

"We chatted, but nothing about politics, I don't know why PMX is worried, he has more than a two-thirds majority in Parliament," Ismail Sabri said when contacted.

However, Sembrong MP Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein was all over TikTok the last few weeks, with many linking him to the Dubai Move.

Hishammuddin has been spending a lot of time in the Middle East where he has close ties with the Saudi and Emirati royal families.

He told *The Star* he has nothing to do with the Dubai Move and was doubtful if there was such a thing going on.

However, he and his wife spent the holidays in Dubai last month

and he forwarded a photo of them amid the desert dunes, their arms around each other.

Not many are aware that Hishammuddin and Anwar have been in touch. The former minister has personally told PMX that he will stay on the government bench and will not do anything to undermine the stability of the government.

Whispers about the Dubai Move started in early December and it was coming from the pro-Pakatan Harapan bloggers rather than the usual suspects from the opposition side.

Some of them even claimed the prime minister's post had been reserved for Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), which may explain why the Prime Minister called Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg for a meeting in Putrajaya four days before Christmas.

Anwar must have slept well after being assured that GPS is staying put because he announced it the next morning at a dialogue with media editors in Putrajaya, stressing to them that Abang Johari remains committed to the unity government.

By then, speculation about the Dubai Move had swirled to a crescendo, fuelled by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's (MACC) sensational seizure of the 60-storey Ilham

Tower that belongs to Tun Daim Zainuddin.

It was one of those aha moments that had people thinking that something must indeed be cooking for the government to go after Daim, the man with the means to finance the rumoured plot.

Then in a bizarre twist, the deputy director of J-Kom, the government propaganda arm, confirmed the plot and claimed to have knowledge of the meeting in Dubai.

The extraordinary affair had become worthy of a made-in-Malaysia movie as more politicians continue to jump in to offer their two cents worth of what they think is going on. But none of them have been able to provide the names of those who had supposedly met in Dubai.

Whether the Dubai Move is a mirage or a plot that fizzled out will remain a mystery for a while more. But a few conclusions can be drawn from what happened.

For a start, the unity government seems rather too easily rattled despite having 152 MPs and the support of several opposition MPs. Why is it afraid of its own shadow?

It is also evident that GPS now holds the golden key to Parliament. Both sides of the political divide desperately want the Sarawakians on board.

Finally, attempts to undermine the unity government will go on because that is the nature of politics.

The views expressed here are the writer's own