

Muhyiddin's seat secure despite legal setback

By **ZAKIAH KOYA**
zakiah@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Former prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has yet to decide on the next course of action after the Court of Appeal dealt the legal blow in reinstating the four abuse of power charges against him.

His lawyer Amer Hamzah said his legal team would study the grounds of judgment made yesterday by the Court of Appeal's five-member panel chaired by Justice Azizah Nawawi.

"We will study the grounds of judgment before making a decision on what to do next," said Amer.

He was commenting on 76-year-old Muhyiddin's failed bid to

review the decision by a previous Court of Appeal panel that reinstated four abuse of power charges against him linked to the misappropriation of RM232.5mil.

Amer added that the Court of Appeal's decision meant the Perikatan Nasional chairman and Bersatu president has to face charges in court now, but it did not mean he was guilty of those charges.

"Hypothetically, if he is convicted by the trial court, he doesn't cease to be a Member of Parliament immediately upon conviction.

"Under Article 48(1)(e), an MP will only be disqualified if he has been sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than one year or a fine of not less than RM2,000

and has not received a free pardon.

"So, until all these processes have been exhausted, one remains an MP," said Amer.

Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin described the charges against Muhyiddin as political persecution.

"The Court of Appeal's decision is very disappointing. We have left it to the legal team to decide on the next course of action. Such political persecution only strengthens our resolve to fight against these accusations," he said.

Political analyst Prof Wong Chin Huat of Sunway University said whether Muhyiddin will receive political empathy when he goes to trial remains to be seen.

"If the trial seems like a witch

hunt, then he may win sympathy. If it is the opposite, he would lose the deference and goodwill (that he has built over his long political career)," he said.

Wong, however, pointed out that as Perikatan leaders were crying "political persecution", Muhyiddin would most likely continue to be kept as Perikatan chairman and Bersatu president until he has exhausted appeals to the Federal Court, the highest court in the country.

This was because removing Muhyiddin from the posts would be akin to implying that he was guilty of the charges, he added.

"Would going to trial on these four abuse of power charges be a big smear on his political career?"

"I believe Muhyiddin's chances

of becoming prime minister candidate if the Opposition wins a general election have passed.

"As it stands, the goodwill he garnered as 'Abah' during the Covid-19 pandemic, when he served as the eighth Prime Minister, has gradually diminished," said Wong.

Muhyiddin was the prime minister when the country went into lockdown in 2020 and 2021 during the pandemic. He was also popularly known as 'Abah' (father).

In March last year, he was charged with abuse of power and three counts of money laundering.

The Pagoh MP is the second former Malaysian prime minister to be brought to court over corruption charges after Datuk Seri Najib Razak.