

Revisiting the "unity government" idea in Malaysia Malaysian Insider

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After campaigning tirelessly in several by-elections before 2013, PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang was featured in political weekly Siasah in a front-page report headlined "Country without Opposition".

In an exclusive interview at his Parliament office, the PAS leader had suggested setting up of a unity government although his Pakatan Rakyat (PR) scored the biggest upset in Election 2008, winning 82 seats.

"This government is one without an opposition and is formed with the involvement of all political parties, working for a common good of the country.

"He suggested taking the cue from the unity government of Indonesia's Habibie after the Suharto regime was brought down," Siasah reported.

But Hadi's suggestion was met with resistance from within his own party, and was labelled as an attempt to unite PAS and Umno, for the sake of Malays and Islam.

It was based on the political scenario at that time, which saw certain people in the PAS leadership wanting to form a government with Umno.

However, none of the proponents of the idea are in PAS now.

Yet, until today, there are those in PAS who still fear the idea, labeling those who support it as the "unity government gang" especially leaders from Terengganu.

But the PAS president's statement then was clear, the unity government needed to involve all parties in both the Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

In the past few months, the idea of a unity government is rearing its head again, but from the BN's side, especially among supporters of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, as first reported by The Malaysian Insider.

It is understood that he had sent feelers to PR chief Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim through some representatives. Anwar has confirmed it in an interview with the Asia Sentinel portal.

However, this unity government proposal is quite different from Hadi's idea.

It is Najib's offer to Anwar to form a government together, by way of bringing Anwar and his supporters into the current administration.

PKR leaders say Najib is offering the post of deputy prime minister to Anwar, and for four key party leaders to be made ministers.

The irony is Anwar used to be the deputy prime minister to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad until he was sacked in 1998.

"Datuk Seri Anwar rejected the suggestion because he does not want to leave his Pakatan

friends behind," Datuk Saifudin Nasution Ismail (pic) told The Malaysian Insider before the Hari Raya holidays.

According to Saifudin, Najib had tried to meet Anwar in his two visits to Indonesia in June, but Anwar avoided it.

"Anwar arrived in Indonesia a few days before Najib. They were supposed to meet in the airport when Anwar was to leave for Malaysia and Najib had just arrived in Indonesia.

"However, Anwar avoided it by going into the aircraft 15 minutes earlier," Saifudin said.

Why does Najib want a unity government with Anwar?

According to the Asia Sentinel, "This is Najib's effort to start a new court to fight Dr Mahathir, who has allowed bloggers under his control to attack the 'wounded prime minister'."

In short, Najib needs help to protect his position from being continuously attacked by Dr Mahathir, who is unhappy with the prime ministers who succeeded him when he retired in 2003.

"Before this Tun Abdullah (Ahmad Badawi) was the victim. Now it's Najib's turn. So before being attacked further, Najib can say 'I have other options'," it added.

What do others say about this plan?

When the idea was brought by the PAS president after the 2008 general election, half of the leaders in the Islamist party rejected it.

To them, it was akin to "bringing in the ambulance to save a dying BN".

This was because many were convinced the BN government would be unseated in GE13.

But some were thinking, what is wrong with a unity government. Despite getting the 51% popular vote, the opposition had lost in GE13. Election petitions have also failed.

"It's better to work from the inside," said a book publisher who has published many pro-opposition books in the capital city.

Yet, those who were attacked over the "unity government agenda" before are now not comfortable with the idea.

They are questioning why it was shot down when Hadi brought it up, but it is gathering support now when Anwar is involved.

The only comfort for PR leaders is that the talks are still in the early stages and it is too soon to see the direction of a unity government with Najib and Anwar. Especially after Hadi's failed attempt. - August 14, 2013.

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