

Pakatan Harapan aware of risks, pitfalls of pact with Dr Mahathir
Malaysian Insider
March 2, 2016
By Sheridan Mahavera

Opposition politicians are aware of the conflicts and pitfalls of working with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, but say removing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is the bigger priority now.

These risks include facing a more unified Umno under Najib's successor and of Dr Mahathir re-joining the party to campaign against Pakatan Harapan in the next general election.

Observers such as Dr Wong Chin Huat of the Penang Institute also stressed that Pakatan must demand a "down payment" from Dr Mahathir before committing to deeper cooperation with the former Umno president.

This include Dr Mahathir insisting that his son, Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir, also quit the party and that he forms a political party or a vehicle to realise his aims.

"He must also agree to some basic institutional reforms such as withdrawing the National Security Council Bill, the Sedition Act and reforming elections and Parliament," said Wong, who heads the institute's political and social research division.

One aim, different agendas

Pakatan leaders have been ecstatic since Dr Mahathir quit the party on Monday and look forward to working with the 90-year-old on a movement to oust Najib.

On paper, both Pakatan and Dr Mahathir seem to agree on a common aim. But it is what happens after that aim is achieved that shows the inherent conflict of the pact.

In his own words, Dr Mahathir said "he is still Umno at heart". He just does not think that the party under Najib now represents the Umno he wants.

And just like he did in 2008, he would return to Umno if the current president resigns.

Then, Dr Mahathir quit Umno in protest against his hand-picked successor, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. He re-joined in 2009 when Najib took over.

In 2013, he actively campaigned nationwide for Umno and the Barisan Nasional coalition against opposition parties PKR, DAP and PAS.

Pakatan, on the other hand, wants to take over power from Umno and BN. It also wants a raft of reforms to Parliament, elections and the way government operates.

None of these is on Dr Mahathir's agenda.

Najib sole priority

The Pakatan leaders who met Dr Mahathir before the quit announcement on February 29 are well aware of these issues, but stress that they are not obstacles to working together against Najib.

"We are not political newbies at this. We know what we are getting into," said Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah) vice-chairman Datuk Mujahid Yusof Rawa.

"But we are confident that our cooperation will not harm the people's aspirations. The bigger theme here is to save Malaysia. The national interests are bigger than that of Mahathir's or Pakatan's," said Mujahid, who is also Parit Buntar MP.

PKR vice-president Tian Chua, who was also at the meet, puts it another way.

"Removing Najib is the wish of the people. All the problems we face now, the clampdown on the media, more people being charged (with) sedition, all are because of Najib. So removing him is the top priority," said Tian Chua, who is also Batu MP.

Najib's financial scandal-tainted image, said Mujahid, was also causing a crisis of confidence among investors at a time when the economy was in the doldrums.

"We and Mahathir may not agree 100% on everything. But what we do agree on is quite big and it is the main thing now," said Mujahid.

But at the end of the day, said Wong, Dr Mahathir could still be a threat to Pakatan's aims of seizing federal power.

This is because the former wants to bring Najib down so that Umno can do better in the next general election.

Also, with Mukhriz remaining in Umno, Dr Mahathir still has one foot in the party, said Wong, meaning that he would be able to re-enter it again someday.

"So if Pakatan wants to take Dr Mahathir seriously, he should form a party or a vehicle for those aims."

Tian Chua said the coalition was well aware of the possibility that Dr Mahathir would one day become their rival again.

"The problem with this assumption is that the attitude is wrong. What if we build this friendship now and then in the elections he supports us? Any decision we make now we cannot guarantee he will either turn against us or support us later."

But to not work with Dr Mahathir because of these fears was also unacceptable as it allowed Najib to remain in power, said Tian Chua.

Najib relied on this contradiction to stay in power, he said. That is, the people who want him out – in Umno, civil society and opposition – are unable to unite to meet the goal.

“But if old enemies can unite, then maybe we will have hope that this can be achieved,” said Tian Chua. – March 2, 2016.

Copyright © 2015 Edge Insider Sdn Bhd

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianoutsider.com/malaysia/article/pakatan-harapan-aware-of-risks-pitfalls-of-pact-with-dr-mahathir>