

Dr Mahathir, Anwar team up harks back to 'golden era'

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IT is a team up that complements each other's strengths and their support bases, while tapping into a yearning for the golden age of Malaysian politics in the 1980s and early 1990s.

This was how an analyst and Pakatan Harapan leader characterised the Dr Mahathir Mohamad-Anwar Ibrahim partnership, announced late yesterday.

However, ultimate victory in the 14th general election will depend on putting forth a cogent policy platform that can capture the imagination of voters and a second line of dynamic, younger leaders.

The two former political enemies, along with Anwar's wife Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail will lead the PH campaign in GE14, which is less than a year away.

Dr Mahathir was appointed Harapan presidential council chairman, while Anwar its de facto leader. Wan Azizah is the coalition's president in a shared leadership line-up.

PH is made up of PKR, DAP, Amanah and Bersatu. Anwar and Wan Azizah are PKR's de facto leader and president respectively, while Dr Mahathir is Bersatu chairman.

Although both Anwar and Dr Mahathir are old faces, surveys among the electorate show that they still enjoy tremendous support among critical sections of the Malaysian electorate, said analyst Hisomuddin Bakar.

“Dr Mahathir has strong support among young and old Malay voters, especially those in rural areas,” said Hisomuddin, who is executive director of the Ilham Centre.

“Anwar, on the other hand, has the support of non-Malays. So, they both complement each other.”

Surveys by think-tank Institut Darul Ehsan (IDE) in Selangor early this year also reflect this. IDE found that Anwar still enjoys high support despite being out of active politics.

Anwar is currently serving a five-year jail sentence for sodomy, a punishment he claims was trumped up by the Najib administration.

Newly appointed PH secretary-general Saifuddin Abdullah said the new team would hopefully tap into the nostalgia older Malaysians have for the 1980s and 1990s when Dr Mahathir and Anwar were prime minister and deputy.

It was a period when Malaysia experienced its greatest economic expansion, charting growth rates of nearly 8% every year until the 1998 Asian economic crisis.

“It was not just older Malaysians who felt it, everyone below 40 remembers this period,” said Saifuddin.

“The idea is that Dr Mahathir and Anwar used to rule the country, now they are teaming up again to save it.”

The partnership is not free of stumbling blocks. The problem with tapping into nostalgia is that it could also backfire.

This is since the period also coincided with a crackdown on political dissent, such as Ops Lalang in 1987, and the destruction of the country’s institutions, such as an independent judiciary in 1988.

In fact, Anwar himself was first fired from Dr Mahathir’s cabinet and imprisoned on charges of abuse of power and sodomy, both of which the former has denied.

Hisomuddin said PH still needs to build a unified machinery in all states and reduce infighting.

“Conflicting statements between Harapan leaders give a negative impression to voters and prevent them from putting their trust in PH.” – July 14, 2017.

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