

Aussie paper lauds Dr M-Anwar's unlikely pact against Najib

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The next general election heralds a stranger than fiction plot for Malaysians, who had cast their ballots in the last two national polls amid the clarion calls for change, but are now staring at an all too familiar face from the past.

Voters must decide between an incumbent government and leader saddled with allegations of corruption, which have made the international news or install a new administration led by a nonagenarian who had gripped the top post with an iron fist for more than two decades and whose administration was also accused of corruption and abuse.

Opposition parties which had denounced Dr Mahathir Mohamad as a racist and political tyrant in the past, have now named him as their prime minister-designate and vowed that he is committed to instituting reforms.

Even former opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who accused Mahathir of jailing him on false charges, has decided [not to dwell on the past](#) and work with his former nemesis.

In an editorial published today, *The Australian* newspaper, though predicting an uphill task for the previously inconceivable alliance, commended Mahathir and Anwar for their willingness to cooperate.

"Mahathir stepped down in 2003 after 22 years of authoritarian rule as leader of Umno... Anwar was Mahathir's deputy when they fell out 20 years ago. Anwar was then targeted ruthlessly with the dubious allegations that saw him jailed.

"Yet the two men - Mahathir at the same age Robert Mugabe was when he was deposed, and Anwar from his prison cell - have cobbled together an unlikely arrangement aimed at prising Umno from its 60-year domination of Malaysia.

"That nation's stability is of immense importance to our region, which is why Australia has close defence and security ties with it. Mahathir will lead the campaign of the fractious Pakatan Harapan... Should he win, he will seek a royal pardon to allow Anwar to take over as prime minister.

"An opposition under the leadership of a hard-headed, controversial warhorse such as Mahathir (as recently as May he insisted the US and Israel were responsible for 9/11) faces an uphill battle against Najib's Umno. Polls show race-based politics still reflect overwhelming support in the Muslim-Malay community for Umno.

"But Mahathir and Anwar deserve credit for seeking to bring Najib and Umno to book for the 1MDB and other scandals that have damaged Malaysia's standing in the world. The corruption surrounding the 1MDB scandal must be front and centre in the election race," it said.

Najib, on the other hand, has repeatedly denied abusing public funds for personal gain and accused Mahathir of conspiring to topple him in order to engineer his son's political ascension.

Can Dr M handle the workload?

Meanwhile, the *Washington Post* focused on Mahathir's age, posing the question: "When it comes to being a world leader, how old is too old?"

"There certainly are benefits to having older leaders in office - they can draw on wisdom accrued over decades of high-level decision-making, as well as the accompanying support and name recognition.

"But there's no doubt that being a world leader also includes a workload and travel requirements that can be difficult for some older candidates to handle," it said.

The publication noted how some opponents of US President Donald Trump, 71, claim that his poor age, reportedly poor diet and limited exercise, have affected his cognitive ability in a negative manner.

Prior to being ousted, *Washington Post*, said Zimbabwean's former president Robert Mugabe, 92, was known for nodding off during high-level meetings.

"In the United States, (Ronald) Reagan's habit of forgetting things toward the end of his second term led to public speculation about whether his mental health was deteriorating. (After he left office, Reagan was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and his son later claimed that he had exhibited symptoms while he was president)," it added.

However, Mahathir has shown little if no signs of his mental faculties deteriorating with age, still exhibiting his trademark razor-sharp intellect and wit albeit appearing a little frail physically.

"But Malaysian voters' worry may not be that Mahathir has changed too much, but that he has not changed enough. During his 22 years in office, Mahathir had a fearsome reputation as an authoritarian with little time for liberal values, and his tactics paved the way for Najib.

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