

Key players in Malaysia's political storm

With the ongoing political crisis in Malaysia, attention has zoomed in on a group of senior politicians who have the fate of the country in their hands. Malaysia correspondent Hazlin Hassan takes a look at these leaders.

Mahathir Mohamad, 94 Caretaker Prime Minister

He resigned as chairman of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), the party he founded, on Monday and also quit as prime minister. But he was reinstalled by the Malaysian King as interim Prime Minister. Tun Dr Mahathir was Malaysia's fourth and seventh prime minister, and could well be its eighth too if he has enough support from MPs. But he will have his work cut out for him as the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition has seen eroding voter support while Malaysians continue to complain about the high cost of living. His chief concern now is how to pull off a new coalition that would include all the major political parties, as some have deep ideological differences.



Anwar Ibrahim, 72 PKR president

Datuk Seri Anwar had worked for 20 years to regain a place just a rung below Malaysia's prime ministership. But events of the last three days have thrown that expected promotion into doubt. Mr Anwar was deputy prime minister and finance minister in 1998, when he was sacked by Dr Mahathir, who was then president of Umno. On Monday, Mr Anwar lost 11 Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) lawmakers. The party used to have 50 MPs, making it the biggest party in Parliament. Now, PKR has 39 lawmakers – fewer than the Democratic Action Party's (DAP) 42. Umno too has 39 MPs.



Lim Guan Eng, 59 DAP secretary-general

Malaysia's most powerful ethnic Chinese politician was Finance Minister under Dr Mahathir, and chief minister of Penang for 10 years to 2018. With the split in Mr Anwar's PKR, the DAP is now the biggest single political party with 42 MPs. Though some of its leaders are wondering whether Dr Mahathir's moves to abandon PH is a betrayal of voters, Mr Lim has pledged to continue to support Dr Mahathir as Malaysia's prime minister.



Muhyiddin Yassin, 72 President of PPBM

The former deputy prime minister and deputy president of Umno took a huge gamble to fight then powerful premier Najib Razak over 1MDB. He was sacked by Umno in 2016 and formed PPBM with Dr Mahathir. Few expected PPBM to do well in the 2018 General Election, but it did. He was made Home Minister in the Mahathir administration. But after taking PPBM out of PH on Monday, it is unclear what Tan Sri Muhyiddin's next steps would be, while Dr Mahathir attempts to cobble a grand coalition with most of the major parties.



Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, 67 Umno president

The former Malaysian deputy prime minister took over as president of Umno after Najib Razak stepped down in May 2018 following the party's historic loss in the general election. Umno had won 54 parliamentary seats when he took over, but this dwindled to 39 with many of them jumping ship to Dr Mahathir's PPBM due to his weak leadership skills in the early months after Umno lost power. But Zahid later took firmer control of Umno, leading the party to its successful electoral pact with its former political enemy, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS). The Umno-PAS combo won five of the last six by-elections that helped shrink the credibility of PH. Zahid has 87 corruption and related charges against him – the highest among all the former Umno leaders who have been dragged into Malaysian courts.



Azmin Ali, 55 Leader of PKR splinter group

On Monday, 11 PKR MPs, among them four full Cabinet ministers including Datuk Seri Azmin himself, left the Reformasi party and the PH coalition. They are now an independent bloc in Parliament which supports Dr Mahathir continuing as premier. Mr Azmin has always been seen as a staunch supporter of Dr Mahathir, and a keen rival of Mr Anwar. Still, the Azmin faction suffered a big blow yesterday when his key allies in Selangor state decided to remain with PH.



Hishammuddin Hussein, 58 Former Umno vice-president

A cousin of former prime minister Najib Razak, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin stepped back from leadership positions in Umno after the party's 2018 election loss, while remaining as MP of a ward in Johor. Last November, he was accused of trying to bring about 20 Umno lawmakers to PH, after they attended a dinner at the home of Mr Azmin. Mr Hishammuddin's critics have claimed that he is currying favour with the government of Dr Mahathir to avoid being charged over an alleged military deal when he was defence minister.