

**Najib undergoes successful knee surgery**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**August 2, 2011**

COMMENT The one person who could have driven a stake through the heart of the rumour that Pakatan Rakyat's top brass had recently propositioned Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah about being opposition leader did so in inimitable style.

Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the PAS spiritual adviser, gave the rumour short shrift yesterday by calling it a "joke" whose deceitful perpetrators, he said, would have to account for in the hereafter.

It is unlikely that the possibility of incurring divine displeasure would deter the guilty ones; they are the more certain to resort to still more ingenious ways to obtain their objective.

This is the torpedoing of the Pakatan ship before it can dock at Putrajaya by floating the theory that Anwar Ibrahim is a liability to the opposition coalition and therefore must be jettisoned.

By insinuating Razaleigh into the opposition leadership stakes they hope to foment division in Pakatan and portray the latter as a rabble apt to fall apart as the prize gets close.

None of the Pakatan top brass has fallen for the trap though Utusan Malaysia managed to extract some ambiguous remarks from the head of the ulama council in PAS, Harun Taib, to the effect that Razaleigh has a chance of heading the opposition coalition if he can command support from among them in the event Anwar is found guilty of sodomy.

Harun is of course smarting from the strong showing of the professionals in the PAS party elections last June where they emerged with a distinct plurality over the ulama element in the central committee.

Utusan was rooting for the victory of the ulama who are said to be more amenable to the notion of unity talks with Umno; the professionals are flatly opposed.

Hence the ambiguous comments from Harun about Razaleigh and the manipulative glee of Utusan in giving vent to them.

### **Razaleigh's waiting game**

Razaleigh's chances of leading Pakatan for an interim period were considered good in the immediate aftermath of the political tsunami of March 2008.

Razaleigh was asked to bring over to Pakatan something like 10 fellow Umno MPs whose fealty he commanded.

But each time Anwar went back to talk further with the Gua Musang MP, the latter had a steadily escalating number - of cabinet positions and later parliamentary seats, should a snap election be necessary - to press on the putative leader of Pakatan.

Anwar felt that the Kelantan prince was being overly presumptuous and dropped the talks.

Desultory chat between the two did resume in January 2010 as Sodomy II and a possible second jailing of Anwar loomed. But again the talks dribbled off.

For Razaleigh, it is essentially a waiting game that's dependant on two contingencies.

One is the perception that a collapsing Umno would resort to him as savior.

Another is the supposed scandals with the attendant possibility of a jail sentence for Anwar, leading to a

temporary leadership vacancy at the top of Pakatan, with Razaleigh being considered the most suitable unifying man as replacement.

At one stage, both possibilities had a better rating of success than now.

The chances now of Umno imploding are not good. If current leader Najib is seen to be a liability, the party will coalesce around Muhyiddin Yassin, his deputy who is said to be a strong aspirant for the position.

The entirely self-interested don't look for saviours; they look for enablers and the next facilitator on the block in Umno, once Najib is jettisoned, is Muhyiddin.

Razaleigh is not an enabler; he is a presumptive reformer. Umno's stalwarts do not want reform. They like the illusion of reform but not its substance.

That is why Najib, another presumptive reformer, though one with inhibitive baggage, is having so little success at his job.

### **Courtroom of public opinion**

As for the sex scandals surrounding Anwar, these have been around for 13 years, since his first trials for corruption and sodomy in 1998.

Over time, these alleged scandals have taken on the look of a red herring foisted by people who are otherwise at a loss as to how to repel him and what he stands for on the political front.

In other words, the entire controversy is saddled with diminishing credibility until it has reached the present point where if, from the way Sodomy II has thus far proceeded, it eventuates in a jailing for Anwar, you can sure of the electoral postlude: a thumping victory at the 13th general election for Pakatan.

Right now, the chances of victory for Pakatan - particular after the Bersih 2.0 march and the stupefying mess that the Najib administration has made of it - are marginally good.

These would be immensely better should a guilty verdict against Anwar in Sodomy II be unsustainable in the arena where it matters most - the courtroom of public opinion.

As for Razaleigh, it looks like he is destined to be that incurably romantic figure of history, one who misses out wherever the main chance is tantalisingly on offer, like RAB Butler in British Conservative leadership circles in the decade between the Suez debacle (mid-1950s) and the Perfumo scandal (early 1960s), and like Adlai Stevenson in Democratic circles in the United States in the equivalent period.

These were decent men of proven service and caliber but who just did not have the virility to create and seize the main chance.

In Razaleigh's case the missing-out has a hereditary cause: aristocrats expect things to come to them; it's unseemly to sweat too much to make their chances.

In a technology-driven age that's getting steadily more egalitarian, this presumption would be like that guilty verdict looming in Sodomy II: unsustainable.

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