

**Muhyiddin let cat out of the bag on Himpun
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COMMENT Really, there appears to be no such thing as a good time for Prime Minister Najib Razak to call for snap polls.

By 'a good time', it meant conditions where positive factors outweigh negative ones for the re-election of the Umno-BN government.

Najib has been trying to formulate and implement policies for this excess of positives over negatives since taking charge in April 2009.

najib abdul razak in perth chogm 1But every time he feels he has a surplus of good vibes over bad ones, his government is upset by gremlins that have the effect of stalling the recourse to a new mandate as every new PM who desires validity for his reforms is impelled to.

The latest instance of this imp of misfortune dogging him is the attorney-general's filing of intent to appeal the High Court's Jan 9 decision to acquit Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim on a charge of sodomy.

Najib had begun capitalising on that acquittal the day it was delivered, citing it as a demonstration of the liberal reforms he had initiated under his government.

Ironically, this credit-taking had the effect of confirming that the judiciary had indeed been subject to the whims of the executive.

But the opposition was not going to protest this indirect confirmation of their suspicions for obvious reasons: Anwar's acquittal on a case that was filled with unconscionable gaps was right and fitting.

But the sequel for the credit-taking Najib began to turn sour almost immediately.

More expediency than conviction

Right-wingers in his party, already angry that police had allowed Pakatan Rakyat supporters to gather in numbers at the judgment's delivery, now clamoured that the decision be appealed.

anwar ceramah in melaka 040112When the AG's Chambers filed its notice of intent to appeal, the PM decided that not only would he have his cake - take credit for the acquittal, he would eat it too - absolve himself of responsibility for the appeal.

It would have been better if Najib had signaled his displeasure with the AG's decision. It would have suggested there was more conviction than expediency to his reforms.

But the PM is not a man of conviction so much as convenience. Talk of reform and transformation of the economy and polity trips easily off his tongue.

The jargon of progressive management drips from his government's public relations vents but because there is no conviction behind it, the exploitative convenience behind the cupcake soon enough becomes detectable.

It would be wishful thinking for the PM to hope for luck with the good fairies of electoral timing.

Thus far it appears these good fairies have frowned more than fawned on him.

Because of this, the PM has had to resort to munificent measures his deficit-battling government can ill afford, such as the RM500 handout to citizens earning less than RM3,000 a month, to keep on the credit side of the ledger by which, supposedly, the electorate evaluates its leaders.

But even these inducements cannot dispel the fumes emitted by the scandals that almost continually occur on the PM's watch.

Less than rosy prognosis

The cattle-rearing project undertaken by the Wanita Umno leader Shahrizat Abdul Jalil is only the most sensational of the lot in that it contains details lurid enough to sustain the buzz among the chattering classes.

NONEAs if all this were not bad enough, details of his wife's sybaritic shopping expedition in Sydney on a recent vacation only serve to keep the embers of controversy glowing.

Furthermore, with the economic indices - stemming mainly from the glitz outlooks for the United States and Europe - pointing to a less than rosy prognosis for this year than that painted by the government, Najib must be wondering what would it take to create a favourable time for an election.

"I can call spirits from the vasty deep?" says a character in Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth.

To which the protagonist replies, "Why, so can I, so can any man. But will they come when you do call for them?"

Besieged leaders seeking a mandate must wonder at the elusiveness of a propitious time in which to summon electoral spirits from the "vasty deep."

With the clock winding down on his inherited (from predecessor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's) mandate, with the downward draft exerted by recurrent scandals on his watch, and with the glitz of his reforms getting plainer by the month, can Najib avoid the musings of Cassius to Brutus in another of Shakespeare's plays (Julius Caesar):

"The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars, but in ourselves."

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