

**Najib's reform: Now you see it, now you don't**  
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COMMENT A consistent narrative is vital for leaders who are barnstorming the country in the final prelude to an election.

It allows voters to focus on the shorthand that sums up the message of the campaigner-in-chief who is doing the main stumping.

A shifting storyline in the incessant din of the dash to the electoral finishing line would only create a blur where the clarity voters need to make a choice is all-important.

It helps if the narrative can be rendered with the striking concision of Margaret Thatcher's message - 'Labour isn't working' - that enabled her to lead the Conservative Party to victory over Labour in the seminal 1979 general election in Britain.

najib abdul razak in perth chogm 1'Pakatan isn't gelling' may lack the oomph of 'Labour isn't working' as a campaign slogan, but BN chief Najib Razak, in need of a crisp slogan to deflate the opposition, must be wishing he had some albatross to tie around Pakatan Rakyat's neck.

Let's say, if DAP chairperson Karpal Singh continues with his fulminations against party colleagues, or worse veers into taking potshots at coalition allies, Najib would then be able to exploit the seeming divisiveness with a narrative of Pakatan discord that could resonate with the electorate.

The prime minister is having no such luck, though Karpal now and then furnishes the occasion when BN could reasonably think they have tapped a rich vein with respect to portraying Pakatan as fissiparous.

That would give him some reprieve from a hard time on the hustings where the cattle-rearing scandal is only the tip of an iceberg of revelations that reflect, critics say, the moral turpitude of his government.

The almost daily drip-drip of disclosure of government malfeasance is bad enough on the domestic front; what about the ones to come from foreign sources, such as the inquiry now begun in a French court about an arms procurement purchase made during Najib's tenure as defence minister.

Isa Samad's new lease of life

These days the reformist image that Najib has been striving to diffuse around him is about as palatable as yesterday's leftovers.

In some small part, this is due to the PM's inclination to give renewed leases on political life to party stalwarts of low credibility in the eyes of the public.

NONEFormer Negri Sembilan chief minister Mohd Isa Samad is not the only tarnished Umno biggie whose career Najib has been keen to boost with a second innings.

Putting the former party veep, who a few years ago Umno was obliged to suspend for vote buying, in charge of Felda's corporatisation is about as credible a gesture as would be the case if the current Burma reformer Thein Sein were to put his predecessor Than Shwe as chief monitor of the by-elections to be held in that country next month.

Credibility, like a good track record, has to be built up from scratch; it cannot be foisted let alone bought and is eroded in a fraction of the time it takes to acquire.

Najib's decision to support Shahrizat Abdul Jalil's retention of the Wanita Umno chief after she herself tacitly conceded she is no longer sustainable as minister in his cabinet seemingly reflects Najib's penchant for dusting up the tarnished, sprucing them with cologne and letting them continue like past behaviour is not predictive of future deportment.

Shahrizat a winnable candidate?

Coming as it does after the Attorney-General's Chambers had filed an intention to appeal the acquittal decision the Kuala Lumpur High Court rendered in Anwar Ibrahim's sodomy case last January, Najib's decision to endorse Shahrizat as Wanita Umno leader sported a disconcerting 'Now you see me, now you don't' aspect of his reform agenda.

The PM had tried to leverage on the Anwar acquittal as indicative his reforms were working only to have the rug pulled from under him by the AG's filing of intent to appeal.

If you think that was bad, well, things could get worse in Najib-style ambivalence to the entire meaning of political reform.

Recently, he has been emphatic that BN component parties only nominate "winnable candidates".

NONENow that he has decided Shahrizat is retainable as Wanita leader, would he also proceed to think her "winnable" as a candidate in the coming polls?

If he were to field her then the blur that shrouds his concept of 'reform' in the public gaze would be as inhibiting as the haze from forest fires in Indonesia that once threatened our ecology.

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