

'Project IC' RCI could see Anwar, Mahathir tainted

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While all eyes are set on former premier Mahathir Mohamad for his role in the alleged illegal granting of citizenship to immigrants in Sabah for votes - dubbed 'Project IC' - opposition Anwar Ibrahim may find himself in the same firing line.

Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) chief executive officer Wan Saiful Wan Jan said while the recently announced Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) to investigate the matter could prove damaging to Mahathir's legacy, Anwar was similarly part of that legacy when he served as deputy prime minister.

"Some people still blame Anwar for bringing Umno into Sabah before this. The damage will be to the legacy of Mahathir's administration that influenced all senior ministers at that time and if Anwar is involved then he will be tarnished," he said when contacted.

If any evidence emerges from the RCI implicating Anwar, he added, the damage would be serious for the opposition coalition's chief.

Wan Saiful Wan Jan (2)"Anwar is still an active political player but Mahathir has retired... So while it may be damaging to Umno under Mahathir which is the older generation, it will be the current generation (of opposition) who suffers if Anwar is implicated," he said.

Wan Saiful added that while Najib may have been forced into announcing the RCI as damage control due to the defections in Sabah, it would be an opportunity to break away from Mahathir's shadow if he is able to manage the damage inflicted to Umno.

However, political analyst Ong Kian Meng when contacted said while Sabahans may still resent Anwar for bringing Umno into the state, most of the details of 'Project IC' were already in the public domain and did not implicate Anwar.

"The key would be what the RCI reveals but a lot of these things have already been out there except that they are not officially documented," he said.

Anwar had last year claimed that he was "kept out of the loop" when he was deputy prime minister under Mahathir's watch.

Mahathir himself had dismissed that the RCI would serve no purpose and warned that its outcome, either way, would harm the BN.

Najib safe

Ong said even though the RCI may hurt Umno and Mahathir, Najib would remain in a comfortable position.

"To a certain extent, Najib is quite safe but the damage to the past leadership will be obvious when the findings come out," he said.

Ong added that even though it will do some damage to BN in Sabah as the investigation begin, it would not dramatically sway voters as the idea that immigrants were illegally granted citizenship was already public knowledge in Sabah even though there were no official admission.

The main backlash, Ong said, would come if Najib succumbs to internal pressure from Umno against taking any action once the RCI findings are published.

He noted that the premier had on several occasions delayed the announcement of the RCI since February due to pressure from Umno.

'Culprits will inevitably be revealed'

Asked about criticism that the RCI's term of reference did not include the need to identify the culprits or proposed solutions if it was proven true that immigrants were illegally granted citizenship, Ong said the implications were too serious to ignore even though it were not in the commission's scope.

"It would be difficult for them not to at least say something (on those matters), the press will certainly ask about it and the people who come in to testify would touch on it.

"Even if the RCI does not recommend anything (on solving the problem) they can make the evidence clear and that it is a serious problem and pass it to the government's court," he said.

Echoing this, Ideas' Wan Saiful said if the commissioners attempt to avoid going near the culprits or solutions to the problem altogether on the basis that it is not part of the RCI's scope, its credibility would come into question.

"For example if a witness is called and they say a certain leader told me to do this (give out identity cards), if the commissioners say 'no you can't touch on this because it is not in our scope' they will lose all credibility.

"While the RCI will be investigating the blue identity card problem, the public will be judging its credibility," he said.