

**Najib-Anwar: Twists and turns of unseemly fate**  
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COMMENT What a difference a year makes!

Twelve months ago opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim was contemplating the prospect of renewed acquaintance with the walls and wardens of Sungai Buloh prison as judgment day loomed in his trial for sodomy.

From the way the proceedings in the trial went, it was quite clear a guilty verdict would be returned.

We know from writer Dr Samuel Johnson what the prospect of being hung in two weeks does to a man: it concentrates his mind wonderfully, the sage mused.

Anwar's decidedly less terminal prospects, in the event of a guilty finding, would not have had the effect of a similarly stark clarity of focus.

At most, he would have the space and time, extruded from the distractions of the harried day which is the lot of the busily free, to mull innovative ways to implement Pakatan Rakyat's manifesto, Buku Jingga, if opportunity availed.

A year ago, Prime Minister Najib Razak was faced with a situation that was the obverse of Anwar's.

There were no legal or other trammels to his path of fixing on a propitious moment to seek the electoral mandate he needed which he thought to gain via a policy of handing out cash inducements to the needy and embellishing the liberal agenda he promised to implement.

In short, if Anwar's trajectory was shrouded in complication, Najib's seemed paved by munificence to the have-less and the challenge of an attempted course correction - from Umno-BN's autocracy lite to an authentically liberal regime which the ruling coalition's opponents promised to inaugurate if power were given them by voters, something Umno-BN could preempt only by imitation.

Those were the differing predicaments of the pretender to the prime ministerial post and of its holder a year ago when the outcome to the contest between the competing coalitions for the keys to Putrajaya was still very much in the air.

Odds shortened for Anwar

But if a week is a long time in politics as former British prime minister Harold Wilson famously observed, a year must seem an interminable span.

Much happened in 2012, mostly events that shortened the odds against the prime ministerial pretender and raised those against the incumbent's quest for an extension of tenure.

The pretender gained traction from being seen as the object of politically motivated vilification; the incumbent appeared enfeebled by the advantages conferred by his pedigree.

Character, the classical dramatists say, is destiny. The way a person confronts the things that happen to him/her, a number of which may come about as a consequence of his/her characteristic behaviour, conduces to his/her destiny.

"There's no way I'm going to jail," a combative Anwar said, at the tail end of his protracted second trial for sodomy that was inexorably headed towards convicting him.

But the prospects of his acquittal looked dim from the way judge Mohd Zabidin Diah had ruled on the many interlocutory injunctions his lawyers sought in the course of the trial.

Salvation, as Goethe observed, is for those who never cease to strive. "Lawan tetap lawan," ("Strive without end" would be the contextual rendition in English), was the battle cry of the reformasi movement that Anwar led.

Improbably, the Sodomy II verdict acquitted him, justifying Goethe as much as Anwar.

In the sequel, Anwar was shrewd in shaping adverse circumstances to his advantage, whereas Najib proved merely reactive to events rather than being their transformer, an image at odds with his agenda's trumpeted slogans.

Ironic parallels for the two men

Can we then be surprised by the way their differing trajectories, working along the different lines of their axis, have brought them to the point, at the start of 2013, where there are ironic parallels between Anwar's predicament a year ago and the plight of Najib now.

Then Anwar was battling to ward off conviction for sodomy in the courts; now Najib is covertly fighting off allegations in the public domain that he is a felon.

It had seemed that with Anwar in the dock the whole criminal justice system was ranged against him; the same system seems to be in sleepwalking mode towards the felony allegations against Najib which gain credence from the stoutness of the PM's silence.

A year ago it had seemed that while the courts may convict Anwar, the courtroom of public opinion may well demure from the official judgment.

In Najib's situation now, the criminal justice system appears loath to even mount an investigation, but the courtroom of public opinion, a vital arena with a general election

imminent, will surely be mulling an opinion about that reluctance with consequent impact on the ballot.

What a difference the year 2012 has had on the positions of both the postulant and incumbent PM of Malaysia!

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