

**Slips of the PM and Azmin are showing  
MalaysiaKini.com  
Jan 31, 2014**

COMMENT Most observers accept that there is not infrequently a gap between what politicians think and say privately and what they express publicly.

Among occupations it is political leadership that often imposes a need for divergence between what a politician thinks and says privately and what it is politic for him/her to voice in public.

Politicians cannot always be totally truthful but voters expect that the gap between private conviction and public expression does not occur too often, as it would soon create a credibility gap no politician can survive for long without seeming hollow, if not deceitful.

Two men on different sides of the political divide have had their gaps flagrantly exposed or reflected in rhetorical overkill - so soon after the reality of the 'disconnect' between private sentiment and public articulation occurred.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (left) had to endure almost instant exposure of his credibility gap when he said, a day after a meeting of Umno division chiefs earlier this week, that there would not be talks on a unity government when a dialogue commences with the opposition Pakatan Rakyat on the matter of national reconciliation.

At the meeting with the division chiefs, Najib broached the idea of forming a unity government between the ruling coalition and Pakatan, but factions in Umno said to be allied to former PM Dr Mahathir Mohamad shot down the proposal.

The day after the PM was rebuffed by division heads, he was on record on what national reconciliation talks with Pakatan would be about - social, economic and international affairs - and what it would not tread on - a unity government.

It did not help Najib's credibility that PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang just then aired the doubts he said he had entertained about the sincerity of the prime minister's expressions when he received an overture from Umno vice-president Zahid Hamidi to explore the idea of a unity government.

Hadi's doubts on unity government

The overture was conveyed by Zahid when Hadi was in London earlier this month, at a time when Najib was also in the city.

Hadi intimated he had doubts about the whole idea, which was why he instructed his political secretary and PAS secretary-general Mustapha Ali to meet with Zahid, rather than he directly engage with Najib on the matter.

Nothing came out of the encounter between Zahid and Hadi's subalterns in London, which was just as well because by the end of the month Najib was on record as saying that national reconciliation talks would not include discussions on the formation of a unity government.

The truth is more nearly that Najib has been angling to detach PKR from the Pakatan triad for a tie-up with BN, and if that did not work, then for a unity government between his side and Pakatan, but he cannot seem to shift the forces in Umno that are opposed to the idea.

These forces are now assembling behind a move said to be inspired by Mahathir to compel Najib to quit so that a forceful government, employing the hard-nosed methods of the strongman who had ruled Malaysia for 22 years, would take the reins and restore to the country the peace and prosperity that were the hallmarks of the Mahathir era.

The other prominent politico who tried straddling the gap - with glaring lack of success - between what he said in private councils and what he aired for public consumption was PKR's deputy president Azmin Ali (right).

He had flatly opposed the resignation of PKR's Lee Chin Cheh as Kajang state assemblyperson, a move that has triggered a by-election in which party adviser Anwar Ibrahim is slated to contest.

But after Lee's resignation was announced and Selangor Menteri Besar Abdul Khalid Ibrahim had declared Anwar as the party's candidate, Azmin made a 180-degree turn of not only supporting Anwar's candidature but also projecting himself as its enthusiastic proponent.

Azmin's overblown rhetoric was the telltale sign of the 'disconnect' between his privately held opinion and public posturing: he pronounced Anwar a world class candidate who Kajang's voters would be fortunate to be represented by.

His hyperbole did not stop there. He invited Najib to contest in Kajang, which Najib

nicely turned aside by contending that PKR's internal problems, widely attributed to Azmin's desire to replace Khalid as menteri besar and countered by the move to insert Anwar into the power play, were not the PM's concern.

Azmin's puffery only served to draw attention to his contrasting positions on the whole matter of a by-election in Selangor.

Also, what is going to be apparent in the next few weeks would be what's conveyed in today's Friday prayers, where Anwar will appear in company with Khalid at a mosque in Batu 10 Cheras, which is in the Kajang state ward.

Their joint appearance today and on subsequent occasions will help squelch speculation that Anwar is out to replace Khalid and that the latter is perturbed by Anwar's proposed entry into the Selangor state assembly.

The truth is more nearly that if anyone is more perturbed, it is the one with the loudest proclamations of public support of the PKR decision to field Anwar in Kajang after ardent opposition to it in private.

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