

**Post-GE13, 'reformer' Najib goes on autopilot**  
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505 FOCUS United States President Barack Obama, during his visit to Malaysia last month, described Prime Minister Najib Razak as a "reformer with much to do" - a remark that came just as the country was about to mark one year after the 13th general election.

One may wonder, is Najib still a reformer, post-GE13? Has he completed what he started? How far have his plans and policies moved in charting the future of Malaysia? Or, has Najib lost his direction?

Najib announced his "national reconciliation" plan the day after the May 5 general election. However, a year after, this has yet to materialise.

With the latest development - where Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim was convicted on March 7 in the Sodomy II case - there is little doubt that the chances of both sides of the political divide working on reconciliation is getting even slimmer.

"Najib's reconciliation plan is a lie. A leader who talks about reconciliation, yet sends an opposition leader to jail... what kind of reconciliation is this?" said political scientist Phoon Wing Keong (left).

It is notable that the liberalisation and transformation promises Najib made in the early stage of his assumption of office following the resignation of predecessor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi after GE12 are barely heard now.

While Najib emphasised on moderation and 1Malaysia in his first term of office, he reversed course after GE13 and pushed for the Bumiputera Agenda to restore support from the Malays.

"Compared with the last two national elections, GE12 impacted BN positively. With Najib taking up the challenge to democratise the country with transformation and liberalisation plans, he hoped to regain support from the multi-ethnic society," said commentator Tang Ah Chai.

"However, GE13 impacted the BN negatively, with Umno having resumed its struggle for race," Tang said.

Reconciliation on back burner

Najib has urged the opposition, which has been emphasising the 52 percent of the popular votes it won in GE13, to concede defeat in the general election as a pre-condition to

commence the national reconciliation plan.

Later, Anwar came out with counter suggestion - a "national consensus" programme where both sides agree on a number key controversial issues. However any hope for talks between the two sides came to an abrupt halt with Anwar's Sodomy II conviction.

"Najib is an opportunist, without firm principles, core values or an ideology. He will change his policies and direction just for his benefit," decried Phoon.

Concurring with Phoon, Universiti Malaya's Centre for Democracy and Elections (Umcedel) director Mohammad Redzuan Othman (left) said, "The reconciliation plan ended even before it could begin.

"Such a plan, without Anwar, will not succeed. Even if it is able to include one or two parties, there will only be partial reconciliation."

Redzuan noted that the BN has tried to pursue reconciliation without Anwar, but nothing positive has come out of its efforts.

While admitting that the reconciliation plan has yet to take form, MCA Youth chief Chong Sin Woon said it was still not too late to pursue it.

"Certain conditions are needed in order to push the plan, but they aren't there. Back then, the opposition embarked on the Black (505) rally and its arrogant attitude prevented reconciliation from taking place.

"So, how can we talk about the reconciliation plan?" Chong said in explaining the BN's failure to push ahead with the plan.

Najib, through his blog in February, denied that the reconciliation has failed. Arguing that it wasn't just empty talk, he stressed that the government would be ready to push it through, following months of preparation.

BN structure has collapsed

But looking at the instances of religious and racial tensions in the country despite BN proudly claiming it represents the voices of all the races in the country, Tang said this indicated that the ruling coalition's structure has collapsed.

"If we talk about Umno having the dominant role, the BN structure was there to support the fragile collaboration. Now, that BN structure has collapsed, the coalition remains in name only."

Strangely, Tang noted, the BN leadership seems reluctant to intervene and prevent the racial and religious tensions from getting worse, but just leaves the issues to take their course.

Chong, the MCA Youth chief, however defended Umno, saying it wasn't Umno's intention to monopolise the coalition.

"GE13 destroyed the balance of power within the coalition. Our voice become smaller. Umno doesn't want to monopolise, it's just that the other parties have failed to perform," Chong said.

While it was quite natural for Najib to allocate the resources to the Malay community, Chong said Najib would need to collaborate with the other BN component parties to get the support of the non-Malays.

Tang (right) cited the MH370 incident, where Najib had shown a lack of confidence in handling questions from the foreign media when he held press conferences on March 15 and 24.

"Many questions were left unanswered, particularly the one where the prime minister said the plane ended at the Indian Ocean," he said.

"Why did he hold the press conferences in the first place, if he was not willing to take questions? Najib could simply have issued statements or announced them on TV."