

## **PM has more to lose than gain from Anwar's jailing**

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**By Stephen Ng**

COMMENT Within just a few minutes after the judgment was read out, and Anwar Ibrahim was found guilty by the apex court, I was amused by the press statement that was sent out by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

As a media consultant myself, I can fully appreciate that press statements can be pre-written in either direction, embargoed until the right moment, before it is released.

However, the PMO statement, in my opinion, is too naïve and released at a wrong time, when the sentiments are still high. It struck a note with Anwar's supporters and immediately became a missile used to hit out at Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

It has been proven that Najib has more to lose than to gain with the five years' jail sentence being meted out against his political foe. He should have learnt from his predecessor's mistake, when the opposition leader was first thrown into prison in 1999.

The sodomy case used against him did not succeed despite being sentenced to nine years' imprisonment in 2000. Neither did the prosecutors succeed with the second episode of sodomy at the High Court level.

In the first place, people are wondering why Najib's administration chose to use a case that has been rejected twice in the past and proceeded all the way to the apex court, exposing our judiciary system to international scrutiny? All this is affecting both Najib and the BN's credibility as the ruling party.

### **Unfair judgment**

Most of the top legal eagles that I have spoken to feel that the judgment by the apex court was "beyond imagination."

A heart-broken former Bar Council president, Ambiga Sreenevasan (right), for example, said she cannot believe that Anwar's political enemies are doing all they can to throw the 67-year-old politician into prison.

"I cannot imagine how Anwar, qualified to be a senior citizen, is going to languish in his prison cell," she said, adding that she, too, will be issuing a press statement soon to add to the voices of the people.

Fellow lawyer Kenny Ng wrote: "While our Supreme Court has passed its verdict, we need to be honest whether that passes the test of public and international opinion. Justice not only needs to be done, but must be always seen to be done!"

Another lawyer, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he, too, cannot understand the grounds of the apex court's decision. "Anwar's lead council Gopal Sri Ram has done a great job in raising doubts about the case," he said. "To me, Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan is not a credible witness."

Saiful Bukhari's credibility has again been raised by Anwar's personal driver when he revealed for the first time that Saiful was never an aide to Anwar.

"He was just Anwar's former aide, Rahimi Osman's friend. He followed Rahimi everywhere and always took the opportunity to make it look as though he is close to Anwar," Abdullah Sani, 55, is quoted as saying in Malaysiakini.

### **Image tarnished internationally**

With the conclusion of Sodomy II, Najib's reputation as a moderate Muslim leader has received the biggest blow in less than one week, than in all his seven years as prime minister of Malaysia.

Anwar's jailing has topped news worldwide and leaders of major powers in the world are reacting strongly to the Federal Court's decision yesterday to uphold the Court of Appeal's five-year jail sentence.

The biggest blow came from UK Minister of State Hugo Swire, who said that, apart "from the integrity of the rule of law, Malaysia must embrace moderation and tolerance to succeed." Malaysia has always told the world that we are a moderate Muslim nation, and tolerance is our way of life.

Swire wrote: "We encourage Malaysia to recognise the importance of international confidence in its judicial system and to restore trust in its commitment to human rights."

Najib has been going around to speak about moderation at international conferences, but his own reputation is now dented. It will only get worse, when the Sedition Act is being used time and again to go after voices of dissent.

There may come a time when the parliament may have only half of the number of opposition MPs, giving BN the two-third majority to push through its much-desired constituency delineation plans.

Within the past 48 hours, the inspector-general of police, Khalid Abu Bakar has warned on his Twitter that at least two politicians (DAP's Nga Kor Ming and PKR's Rafizi Ramli) will be investigated for their tweets.

A third, who is none other than Zunar the cartoonist, is now already in Dang Wangi Police Station since Feb 10, and being investigated under the Sedition Act. The police have obtained a three-day remand order against him.

The powers that be should realise that, with every arrest that they make, it influences a few hundred, if not thousands of ordinary Malaysians against what they consider to be a cruel regime. Like it or not, Anwar's imprisonment is at the height of it all.

Just hours after the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur released its press statement, the White House, in another strongly-worded statement by its national security council, had expressed the White House's deep concerns about the rule of law in Malaysia.

"These concerns," its spokesperson, Bernadette Meehan, said, "are compounded by the government's intent to expand its sedition law, which Prime Minister Najib (Abdul Razak) had pledged to repeal, to prosecute government critics."

Not mincing her words, Meehan said that the US is urging "the government of Malaysia to apply the rule of law fairly, transparently, and apolitically in order to promote confidence in Malaysia's democracy, judiciary, and economy."

In the White House portal, a petition to President Barack Obama asking for Anwar's release has received over 14,000 signatures within a short period after the signature campaign was created. It hopes to reach a goal of 100,000 signatures by March 12, in order to attract the attention of the US president.

### **Now that Anwar is in prison**

Now that Anwar is in prison, his fate can only be known after the 14th general election, which must be held before May 2018.

Unless at the mercy of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Anwar is pardoned, his jail sentence will carry him through till 2020. Hopefully, by then, a new Malaysia would emerge.

Technically speaking, by the next general election, Anwar may still be languishing in prison, but as a fellow writer, RK Anand, wrote, "Hope cannot be jailed in Jalan Harapan (referring to the road in front of the Sungai Buloh prison)."

The people's sentiments are now with Anwar and his family. Anwar's absence once again from active politics will make it harder for the people to give Najib's 1Malaysia slogan the credence he thought he deserved, especially since Anwar had offered the olive branch to Najib as early as 2013.

BN will also find it hard to win back the people's heart, because Anwar's fight for justice has indeed struck a chord within their own hearts after realising that 58 years after Merdeka, they are still living in a feudalistic society.

Will Najib, and the BN, survive beyond 2018? This question is on everyone's mind for now.

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