

## **Najib and Blatter in the same boat**

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COMMENT Right now, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is in the same situation as Fifa president Sepp Blatter in wanting to complete his term in office on the grounds that he was democratically elected and therefore has a mandate to implement his agenda in the time he has left on his term.

The comparison is not arbitrary: Umno, like the world governing body of football, has been in a freefall in terms of integrity for a long time and the shenanigans enveloping the sovereign wealth fund, 1MDB, is symptomatic of all that is wrong with the political party, just as yesterday's arrests in Zurich of seven top ranking officials is emblematic of the moral corruption that has dogged Fifa the past few decades.

But Najib, even in the face of daunting criticism demanding he go simply because he was 1MDB's overall minder, is insisting on staying while Blatter, untouched thus far by the corruption charges against a coterie of officials with whom he appears to be on good terms, is expected to contend that the head can continue, even for another term, regardless of the gangrene infecting significant other parts of the body he leads.

Never mind that the scaffolding on which both leaders stand has crumbled and their credibility damaged beyond hope of repair, the two supremos will not walk the plank.

Both Umno and Fifa have been haemorrhaging credibility over the same length of time - about a quarter century - but when one is in the saddle of a dominantly popular political party in the one instance, and a compellingly popular sport in the other, a logic of entrenchment embeds the mind of the incumbent, making it quite easy for him to ignore counsels of caution and circumspection.

An overly long occupancy in power, to tweak Lord Acton's famous aphorism about its consequences, confers a delusive feeling of invincibility in executors, the momentum of past triumphs rendering a false sense of mastery over current travails.

In these straits, it does not take long for supporters to become courtiers but at the first rent in the delusive web, the same toadies can become turncoats.

The only way to forestall a Brutus-triggered revolt is to read the writing on the wall.

### **Past the point of reading the writing on the wall**

But Najib and, very likely, Blatter are well past the point where they can see the inscriptions or if they can, interpret them accordingly.

Moreover, Najib can reach for the same arrows in his quiver to deflect the darts blown at

him by his chief interdictor, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who during his protracted premiership dished out the same drivel about party interest and unity superseding all other considerations.

What's more, Naib can do this with a certain measure of conviction because when he placed his personal career interest over party interest in a crucial vote in 1987, he enabled Mahathir to retain the Umno presidency by a whisker.

That was a rare instance when personal interest dovetailed nicely with the interest of the incumbent president of Umno to wrench the party away from its originating ideals to become the hub of venality it presently is.

In other words, the incumbent can turn the same verbal salvoes his chief tormentor employed in the past to telling effect against him now.

Najib can parody the former boss to an extent where his supporters in the party can with conviction tell the epigone that even if it's a hamster that's presently in charge, he's all they have got and courtiers usually elect to go with what they have got - that's the role of a courtier.

No prizes for guessing which president of Umno converted the party into a haven for courtiers!

As for the hapless Swiss-German who, even if the morally marred Fifa were to postpone its quadrennial elections scheduled for tomorrow, decides to go for a fifth term - what one of the game's greats, Diego Maradona, called "an absurdity" - he would not be exceeding the longevity in office of his predecessor, Joao Havelange, who had six terms at the helm (1974-98), an unspeakably long reign in which he all but upended the Victorian values of the Englishman, Stanley Rous, from whom the plebeian Brazilian took over.

In sport, as in politics, when the plebes take over from the Victorians, quality goes down the chute.