

After DOJ expose, GE14 likely to be pushed back
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COMMENT No prime minister of Malaysia has ever been investigated by the FBI. The announcement, made no less by FBI's number 2 and the United States attorney-general, was the biggest indictment on 1MDB to date.

Scandalous revelations, topped with Beverly Hills mansion, penthouses, yachts, Van Gogh and money-laundering, provide all the political ammunition which could easily be exploited by the prime minister's opponents. The expose gave to the 1MDB saga something which it lacks all along - an image and a language the rakyat can relate to and outraged by, told by an authoritative institution whose sole job is none other than hunting criminals.

With fingers pointed and spotlight directed at 'Malaysian Official 1', the pressure is on Putrajaya. The FBI certainly said it as it is; "International public corruption", "global money-laundering conspiracy" , and "the Malaysian people have been defrauded on an enormous scale".

While it is an ongoing civil lawsuit, the chief of the FBI's International Corruption Unit noted that a criminal investigation is ongoing. Subsequently then, the worst has yet to come for the culprits of money-laundering and plunder.

Which surely brings about this, GE14 will not be held any time soon.

Prior to the Department of Justice (DOJ) expose, the ruling Barisan Nasional was buoyed by the triple joys of fortune lately (Sarawak state elections, two by-election victories, and a significant swing among Chinese voters). Rumours circulated among the political circles that the prime minister might be calling an early election, sometime between quarter and mid-2017.

It would have been a decisive advantage to the incumbent, as not only they enjoy the said advantages but also, they would cut away the time for the disarrayed opposition to sort out their differences.

Then came the FBI and DOJ who announced to the world that a fund owned by the Malaysian government is subject to the largest case of kleptocracy in FBI's history, ensuring

that all major newspapers and primetime media (except our own apparently) would air the news.

The difference, this time, is that FBI is not a media whom the government can simply sweep aside. It is part of the US government and remarks need be calculated so as to not ruin diplomatic and economic ties. America is our top three largest trading partner, and a fallout would bring severe economic and foreign relation setbacks.

Going by the prime minister's traits, he would probably 'ride it out' till it has been somewhat forgotten. He is unlikely to gamble and risk an early election when his administration is under so much scrutiny, domestically and globally.

But you can't make people forget something that is still current. The investigation will continue, suspects hunted, and hence more revelations to come. The longer the investigation, the more suspects will be called, assets seized, officials quarried, the longer it delays the election.

The government surely does not want the DOJ or FBI to make another damning indictment in the run-up to, if not in the midst of, the campaign. This is not to say that it will delay the election indefinitely, but the timing of the election must surely now be synchronised with the phase of DOJ investigation, if the prime minister's advisers have a keen mind on political strategy.

Much-needed break and relief

The delay gives a much-needed break and relief to the almost hapless opposition. Without discounting the daunting tasks to negotiate their differences, Pakatan Harapan is nowhere near the Pakatan Rakyat of 2013, which was a force to be reckoned with and touted as an alternative government.

PAS, a major player among the Malay-majority and rural seats (which form the chunk of the electorate), can't seem to make up its mind whether it's the government's adviser or an opposition party. The current Pakatan Harapan plus one is a pale shadow of its youthful self, stripped of leadership and vision.

With the gift of a few extra months, the opposition needs to sort out two imperatives - what kind of a coalition is going to face off with BN, and what their vision is.

One-on-one fights is their best chance of defeating BN and win as many seats as possible. But truly, we have to question whether it is sufficient to 'deny BN'. What if they really win a majority of the seats, enough to form the government?

Would it all be an overnight scramble to decide who the prime minister will be, who will head the all-important ministries, and what their policies will be?

And what if they really did manage to negotiate one-on-one fights, only to have PAS ending up with enough seats to be the kingmaker? Would PAS form the government with BN or Pakatan?

What if PAS sets the implementation of hudud in Kelantan as the criteria for cooperation? Would Pakatan (or BN) swallow the bitter pill and proceed to form a government with hudud-implementing PAS, or would they let go of Putrajaya when they are right there at the doorsteps, wishing they knew what to do with what they know will come?

So much to be sorted out that even a few months of delay may not increase its chances of succeeding. But it sure does give them more time and space. However, that is dependent too on the Penang snap election, where seat negotiation (among Pakatan Harapan parties and also between Pakatan Harapan and PAS) is sure to be thorny, if not divisive.

As we learned in Sarawak, clashes in a few seats will have major repercussions for all the seats and national support/disillusionment for the involved parties.

Until and unless we, somehow, get out of this dark tunnel, till the day when we can hold our heads up and be proud of Malaysia in the international stage again, the sad state of Malaysian politics provides the occasion to paraphrase the old Malay proverb, "politikus lawan politikus, rakyat mati menanggung seksa dan malu di tengah".