

## **Ex-US envoy: Will Anwar be jailed immediately?**

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Should Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim be again found guilty of the latest round of sodomy charges, would he be denied bail and jailed immediately?

NONEThis scenario is being pondered aloud by former US ambassador to Malaysia John R Malott, in an opinion piece in The Wall Street Journal - the largest circulated newspaper in the US - yesterday.

"When I visited Malaysia last month, it was clear that not just Anwar but also most observers expect a guilty verdict in August," wrote Malott.

"At that point, the question is whether he remains free on bail during his appeal or is jailed immediately."

NONEMalott (left) said that his stint in Kuala Lumpur between 1995 and 1998 had convinced him that the ongoing second sodomy trial was purely politically motivated.

"Everything I knew then and know now, leads me to conclude that this trial also is an attempt to sideline him politically," he said.

BN's game plan

Drawing upon Anwar's successes during the 2008 general elections, Malott argued that the current sodomy trial was designed to slow down the fledgling opposition.

NONE"The government's new politically game plan seems to be to put Anwar in jail and the opposition in disarray, call snap elections, and ride to victory," he added.

Malott said that odds are heavily stacked up against Anwar, with the government-controlled media already having "convicted" him and crucial evidence being denied to the defence team.

"Malaysia does not have a jury system. The verdict will be rendered by one judge, appointed by the same government that wants to remove Anwar from the political scene," he said.

In his article, Malott argued that the BN government is plagued with a host of problems and is bent on locking up Anwar to prevent him from speaking out.

He notes that Malaysia's economy in recent years had showed modest growth rates, but figures were buoyed by government spending resulting in soaring debt levels while foreign direct investments (FDI) remained scarce.

The outflow of skilled labour was also a major concern as almost 500,000 Malaysians or two percent of the population, comprising of non-Malays worried about a lagging economy along with racial and religious tensions, had left the country between 2007 and 2009 alone.

Malaysia at a crossroads

In view of dwindling political support, Malott said the ruling party was turning back to its

"base instincts" by playing to the Malay-majority gallery.

NONEThis includes attempts to forbid Christian use of the term 'Allah' and the government's tacit backing for "new militant group" Perkasa.

These issues had led Malott to conclude that Malaysia was at a crossroads and the outcome of Anwar's trial will play a major role in the nation's path.

"The road that it chooses matters not only for some 30 million Malaysians, but for the entire world. The country could be a model for the 600 million Southeast Asia and for the entire Muslim world, if it returns to the promising course it was on 15 years ago.

"But a guilty verdict for Anwar means that the corruption and cronyism that now pervades Malaysia, its lack of political freedom and its economic decline, will continue," he said.

The sodomy trial will resume in August, with the defence team expected to cross-examine a doctor who inspected accuser Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan.

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