

## **Crossovers: What if nothing happens?**

**Malaysiakini.com**

**Jun 17, 2008**

**Ong Kian Ming and Oon Yeoh**

PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim's recent political statements have focused on two promises. Firstly, that Pakatan Rakyat would form the next government by Sept 16 this year. Secondly, that he would slash petrol prices once Pakatan is in power.  
MCPX

What is the likelihood that he will be able to keep these promises? What would the political fallout if he fails to live up to them? This is the topic of today's podcast.

rustam sani book launch 260408 anwar pcObviously, the second promise is predicated on the first. He cannot possibly lower petrol prices if Pakatan is not in power. So, let's examine his first promise first.

We have stated in the past that we think there is an element of bluffing when he says he has the numbers to form the next government. This doesn't mean he doesn't have any MPs committed to switching. We just think he doesn't have enough, at least not yet.

That said, we are of the opinion that it is a good strategy to take because it can result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. It's also a bluff the Barisan Nasional cannot call him on. They have to assume a worst-case scenario.

Anwar's recent reiteration of the Sept 16 deadline is not only a deadline for himself to get the job done, but also a means to push those MPs who have hinted that they would cross over to Pakatan to make the actual leap. In short, his message is "the clock is ticking, if you're not on board now, you may miss the boat."

However, recent developments might hinder his progress in securing crossovers from Sabah. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who obviously takes the threat seriously, has announced a series of incentives meant specifically at assuaging the Sabah MPs. This includes increasing development funds to every constituency and appointing a Sabahan as the vice-chancellor of the University Malaysia Sabah.

While not all Sabahan MPs are totally satisfied with these incentives, most notably Yong Teck Lee of SAPP, they do seem to have quelled the discontent somewhat. A new option is now being bandied about, which is instead of joining Pakatan, a new Sabah party would be formed to fight for the interests of Sabah, and this party would be an independent. That way, it can play the role of kingmaker and can negotiate the best deal from BN and Pakatan.

### **Will it erode Anwar's credibility?**

So, what happens if Sept 16 comes and goes and BN is still the government of the day? Would Anwar's credibility go down the drain? We don't think so.

Anwar, being the masterful politician that he is, can always come up with some viable excuses. He could say, for example, that credible sources within the government have told him that certain factions in the BN is ready to create trouble if Pakatan attempts to take

over the government. Or he could say the government will resort to draconian measures to stop this from happening – measures that would destabilise the country.

Such face-saving measures can minimise the political damage arising from missing the Sept 16 deadline. It's much more difficult for Anwar to renege on his second promise, to decrease petrol prices if Pakatan becomes the next government.

While Kian Ming was surprised that he reiterated this promise almost immediately after Abdullah announced the petrol price hikes, Oon was not taken aback as he predicted that this would be one of the populist overtures that Anwar would make.

Although as a former finance minister, Anwar knows full well the high cost of oil subsidies and the negative impact it would have on the government's budget, he obviously believes that this is a price worth paying in order to garner popular public support.

He is somewhat helped by the fact that Abdullah has already raised petrol prices. If he had come into power with the petrol price at RM1.92, it would have been much more challenging for him to lower petrol prices, something he promised to do through the election campaign period.

Now that petrol is priced at RM2.70, he has more flexibility. He could, for example, reduce the price to RM2.60 or RM2.50 and still claim the moral high ground of being able to keep his promise.

So, can Anwar keep his promises? We think not for a Sept 16 takeover but yes for reducing petrol prices. Will he suffer if he reneges on his promises? We think not for the former, but yes for the latter. After all, not all promises are created equal.

We dedicate this article to Tim Russert, a respected American political journalist and host of Meet the Press, who died of a heart attack last Friday. Sunday mornings will not be the same without Tim.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.  
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/84574>