

Arresting Anwar - BN scores own goal
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Barisan Nasional has a knack of scoring own goals. If there was an anti-Sun Tzu handbook on how to advantage your enemies, many of the BN's plays would be in there. The latest own goal scored is the decision to arrest de facto PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim.
MCPX

Perhaps it is BN's penchant for scoring own goals which is one reason why Anwar is trying to topple the government sooner rather than later. Yesterday, we had discussed how Anwar might have overstretched himself in his quest to take over power.

In a way, it was not that surprising that Anwar has chosen to try to form the next government as quickly as possible. If we put ourselves in his shoes, the political calculations become more apparent. He has to strike while the iron is hot.

anwar ibrahim and ahmad shabery cheek debate 150708 11If Anwar were to wait patiently for the next general election to come around and try to win power through that channel, he would have to wait another four years or so, depending on what transpires within Umno in the interim.

The BN, as well as the opposition, were surprised by the electoral outcome in this year's election. Everyone expected the BN to lose perhaps as many as 40 seats but not 82. As such, the full weight of the state was not used in the run-up to the elections.

There is no guarantee that the BN will not do everything in its powers – including using all sorts of dirty tactics – in the next elections to win back a two-thirds majority and the states of Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor.

Anwar is well aware of this possibility, having witnessed or perhaps even overseen some of these acts himself while in the BN.

Fortune favours the bold

Right now, Umno is in a precariously weak position. Its president is an ineffectual leader who just oversaw the worst electoral result in BN's history and still refuses to step down. His deputy, who is also his greatest political rival, has been politically neutralised with a scandal hanging over him.

Furthermore, the current state of voter disenchantment with the government is still running high, especially after the recent petrol hikes. The government is also scoring one own goal after another.

Why not take advantage of the current situation and try to topple the government? There is no guarantee that these favourable factors will still be present in four years' time.

It has been said that 'fortune favours the bold'. Anwar has certainly been 'lucky' in his bold attempt to take down the government. The BN itself is guilty of providing Anwar with additional political momentum each time he has faltered.

They failed to call his bluff that he had enough crossover MPs to form the next government when they refused to allow the debate on the motion of no-confidence in Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to take place.

If they had allowed this, although it would set a precedence of allowing the opposition to successfully table a motion, it would force Anwar to show his cards, so to speak. Does he or does he not have the numbers?

If Anwar indeed had 30 MPs in his pocket, why did none of them stand up to support this motion? Instead, the BN chickened out, giving people the impression that they were scared of Anwar.

Cops need Chua Soi Lek-type tape

There are more examples from recent events. The massive roadblocks that they set up on the day the motion was supposed to be debated is clearly an own goal. The ensuing traffic jams – which stretched from Kuala Lumpur all the way to Shah Alam only served to further fuel public anger against the government.

Nobody blames Pakatan Rakyat for this. When the drivers stuck in a jam on the Federal Highway, they don't see opposition supporters on the roads. They see policemen inconveniencing them for no particular reason.

Then of course, there is the latest and stupidest own goal: Arresting Anwar. This is the best way to generate sympathy and headlines for Anwar domestically as well as internationally.

The manner in which the police went about this investigation was an overkill to say the least. From going to his house with more than 10 policemen just to pass Anwar a court order, to interrogating him for six hours, to requiring him to go for a medical check-up, to detaining him overnight – all these are actions reminiscent of 1998.

Even if the police believe that Anwar is guilty of the sodomy allegations, they must know that without a smoking gun, whatever evidence they think that they have against him will not be deemed credible in the public's eye. Circumstantial evidence may sometimes be enough to convict someone in court but in the court of public opinion, nothing less than a Chua Soi Lek-type videotape will do.

Make no mistake, this is not any normal criminal investigation.

The political leaders within BN and Umno must realise the high political costs of going after Anwar like this without incontrovertible proof. But perhaps not knowing any other way - except how to use the blunt instruments of state power - the BN has once again scored another brilliant own goal.

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