

BN's lose-lose proposition
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De facto PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim has now been charged for sodomy. But whether he is later found guilty of these allegations or not, the result is nothing but a lose-lose proposition for Barisan Nasional, which we had noted in a MCPX past podcast, is particularly adept at scoring own goals.

The fact that Anwar is charged does not prevent him from contesting in the upcoming by-election in Permatang Pauh, scheduled for Aug 26. He will only be disqualified from holding any political position if he is convicted of this charge. But a trial will probably take months to resolve, long after Anwar presumably wins the Permatang Pauh by-election.

permatang pauh past election results 060808Barring massive vote rigging or Anwar's disqualification over a technicality, there is no way that the BN will be able to win back the Permatang Pauh seat. The best result that they can hope for is to decrease the majority by which Anwar's wife, Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail won this seat in the general election in March. But even that is unlikely to happen.

The pressure that is being brought upon Anwar on the part of the police and the BN government is just the thing Anwar needs to swing the Malay vote back to his side. While the Malay vote may have been wavering, during and after the March general elections, the continued persecution, as perceived by most of the public, of Anwar, has undoubtedly damaged BN and Umno's standing amongst the Malays.

Many of Malays who voted for the BN in Permatang Pauh in March would find it much harder to vote against Anwar in the upcoming by-election and this will almost assuredly provide a larger winning majority for him.

The police obviously think that they can convict Anwar if they are going to charge him. After all, it would not make sense for the police to charge him if they thought they could not obtain a guilty conviction.

But it's worth mentioning that winning a case in a courtroom is very different from winning a case in the court of public opinion. Barring a videotape recording ala Chua Soi Lek, it is hard for us to imagine the police providing anything more than circumstantial evidence against Anwar.

Try as we might, we can't imagine what evidence the police could have that would convince the public that Anwar is guilty as charged.

It's hard, for example, to imagine any physical DNA that the alleged victim may have 'kept' after being sodomised. Even if there is CCTV footage showing Anwar and Saiful going into the condo where the alleged sex took place, this is far from concrete evidence that such an act was committed.

BN playing a dangerous game

Ask any man on the street and a healthy majority would say that this is nothing but a huge

conspiracy against Anwar. This view has been backed up by recent survey data released by the Merdeka Center. By even allowing such a case to go to trial, based on presumably what will be circumstantial evidence at best, the BN government once again puts itself in a lose-lose situation.

If Anwar is somehow found to be not guilty, he can use this to say that it was all part of an unsuccessful campaign on the part of the BN government to taint and smear him. It will give him a momentum boost, both domestically and internationally, in his efforts to topple the BN government, this time as Permatang Pauh MP and the leader of the opposition.

If he is found to be guilty, he will not take this conviction sitting down. We can expect there to be a massive public backlash against the government and it would not be surprising if massive rallies were to take place all over the country in support of Anwar and against the BN government, especially in the five states that Pakatan Rakyat controls.

Some conspiracy theorists have speculated that this is perhaps the end game that the BN is hoping to reach. By provoking massive public unrest, the BN can use this opportunity to declare an emergency and suspend all political activities including the functioning of the parliament and state assemblies.

If this is indeed the case, the BN is playing a very dangerous game. There is no guarantee that the current Agong, who has shown something of an independent streak, will acceded to the demands of the PM to declare such an emergency.

Investors, already jittery over the current political situation, will most certainly flee the stock market and dump the ringgit. Furthermore, unlike 1969, when the country was less developed, there is no guarantee that today's more informed and more politically assertive voters will take this situation lying down.

While Anwar might have to suffer the short-term 'pain' of going through another trial of this nature, this might be exactly the type of momentum boost that he needs to tip the BN over the edge and Pakatan into power.

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