

Sept 16: What will 'cornered animal' BN do?
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A survey of the political landscape ahead is timely. The combined momentum of the Permatang Pauh by-election and the steady one-upmanship Pakatan Rakyat has enjoyed in recent months make the prospects of a new government an increasingly compelling possibility.

If in March, parliamentarians considering crossing from Barisan Nasional to Pakatan were concerned that they would jump and find no one behind them, the landscape seems to have changed to the point where many may worry that if they don't commit to jumping now, they may be left behind on the wrong side of the fence.

The fact all that binds BN together is racially-divided power-sharing means that without power, all there is left of the ruling coalition is racial division; seems a terrible creek to be up without a paddle.

Given the huge stakes, we must ponder with grave seriousness how BN, or more specifically Umno, will react to this threat.

abdullah ahmad badawi maha agriculture exposition 120808 01My view is that Umno has still been playing with their gloves on. Attempts thus far to frustrate Anwar Ibrahim's bid for Putrajaya appear almost half hearted and disorganised; the word bumbling admittedly comes to mind.

Perhaps Umno has continued to live in denial and hope against hope. It is dangerous and foolhardy to assume that this thinking will prevail in the face of growing 'cornered animal' instincts kicking in. Umno stands to lose everything, and the word everything is not used lightly; it seems unlikely that they will sit idle while the government is taken from under their noses.

If and when they awake, Umno's top leadership will find an arsenal of weapons with which they could potentially take out Anwar, and by extension, Pakatan.

Many possible scenarios

Let's start with the relatively mild. First, there is always actual reform and trying to buy the heart of Malaysians via various goodies in the new Budget and such; I don't think there's any evidence at all to suggest that BN is likely to take this route lock, stock, and barrel – which is the only way it would work.

There is also trying to get on the good side of the Agong; many possible scenarios for both BN and Pakatan are technically at the discretion of the sovereign.

Next, we note that it would be a simple matter to fix the sodomy case, ala the 1998 trials. Certainly, they would look like fools and suffer the wrath of the international community; but is that so high a price to pay to escape extinction and fears of being prosecuted themselves?

This is after all the yardstick against we must measure all potential options available to Umno: that they will lose federal power not only in these elections, but essentially forever.

The feudal structure of Malaysian politics and the manner in which every politician alive today is born and bred on the premise that to be BN is to be in power; remove power, and all that remains is some vague racial ideology that is decades behind present-day global political correctness.

If Anwar is convicted in the courts and should appeals all the way to the Federal Court fail, it will take quite a bit of undoing to redeem the mess, no matter how drastic a sham the legal process may be.

International pressure alone is not likely to yield any significant change; our leaders are known to have thick skin when they need to. All in all, it's still a bargain, if it keeps Anwar out of power.

Ops Lalang II looms?

Ops Lalang II is the next option, in terms of intensity – simply round up all the major Pakatan leaders and detain them without trial, crippling Pakatan to the point of inoperability.

anwar ibrahim and lim kit siang parliament 290808 03Assassination, in all honesty, is probably still a bargain as well. Yes, there will be a massive uproar, Anwar will be martyred, and discontent will reach unprecedented levels. Yet, at the end of the day, police investigations will be inconclusive, Anwar will be gone, and Pakatan becomes eminently vulnerable.

With or without an assassination, there is also the opportunity to engineer large-scale street chaos and violence, using the 1969 Emergency as a model of how to engineer a transfer of power.

Do these measures sound unreasonably extreme and unlikely? To you and me perhaps, but once again, we must take the perspective of individuals who are looking at a lifetime legacy of destroying their political party, losing all access to wealth and power, and facing some serious prospects of significant jail time.

I think under those circumstances, the prospects of facing derision and shaming by the international community as well as local storms that will hopefully just blow over, start to sound a little more tolerable than usual.

A snap general election

One of the few factors generating resistance for BN/Umno to embark on any 'adventurous' tactics is the lack of unity amidst its top leadership. Ever since March 8, Umno leaders especially have had to fight battles on multiple fronts, exhausting their already stretched resources.

This situation may somewhat dilute any attempt at concentrated scheming. Unfortunately, this same intra-BN/Umno disarray is exactly what will make for a weak, distracted ruling coalition whose ability to govern strongly and well may be compromised considerably.

One controversial option to forestall any such drastic measures by the powers-that-be is for Malaysians to push for a change of government – either by crossovers, or calling for a snap general election (a potential last resort for BN, which is good for democracy, but unlikely to forestall the ruling coalition's demise).

While less than ideal, these remain some of the few ways we can avoid a descent into chaos and desperation within BN, and by extension within Malaysia.

Malaysia has crossed one defining moment only to find itself at the cusp of another. In light of the ultra high stakes cost-benefit calculations facing Umno leaders, we must now increase our vigilance and prepare to resist, both peacefully vigorously, any attempt to usurp democracy and the rule of law.

Malaysians are now called upon to use well-informed people power to provide a rock steady bulwark against any vicious and desperate manoeuvring.

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