

**Barisan Nasional on the run**  
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After its general election fright, Barisan Nasional's first ploy was to stand and fight. But instead of successfully counter-attacking by cleaning up its act and enacting the reforms the prime minister keeps promising, it fought as dirty as ever.

It hit Anwar Ibrahim with a new sodomy charge, blocking Malaysia-Today.net, threatened to throw the immensely-popular Raja Petra Kamarudin into jail, and then employed race and money as weapons in the Permatang Pauh by-election

But all these assaults have only strengthened the resolve of the majority of the rakyat to run BN out of office.

anwar ibrahim enters parliament building as mp 280808And, with Anwar back in parliament, heading the opposition and confidently predicting he'll get enough crossovers to win government, BN's resolve to fight is increasingly turning to thoughts of flight.

How else to explain the extraordinary fact that, instead of staying around in this hour of peril, and helping govern the country, 40 or so Barisan Nasional MP's have run off for a "retreat" to study agriculture in Taiwan.

I say 40 "or so" because figures vary as to how many have gone. In fact the whole expedition has been so sudden, strange and confused that it's become a running joke.

bung mokhtar parliament 080708 02According to the first report I saw, BN Backbenchers Club (BBC) deputy chairperson Bung Mokhtar Radin sent BN MPs a SMS message reading "BN BBC has received approval to hold a retreat overseas from Sept 7 to Sept 19. The attendance of all MPs is compulsory."

The choice of the term "retreat" was a little unfortunate, I thought, given that many would leap to the obvious conclusion that the jaunt was timed to prevent MPs from jumping onto the PKR bandwagon by Anwar's stated deadline of Sept 16.

And of course that's what most people did. According to a Malaysiakini story I saw, Mas Gading (Sarawak) BN MP Dr Tiki Lafe told The Borneo Post that the opposition could make use of the BN trip "to create all kinds of wild rumours".

He also ventured the opinion that: "As the time is now considered 'critical', we have to be more practical. When the opposition is boasting of taking over the government everyday, there is more reason why we should be in our respective constituency."

dr tekhee tiki lafeTiki reportedly added that he hoped that "his criticism of the retreat would not be interpreted as an intention to defect to Pakatan Rakyat and that people should not question his loyalty to BN".

Less temperate and accommodating in his remarks was an unnamed Johor BN MP quoted by Wan Hamidi Hamid and Shannon Teoh in The Malaysian Insider as declaring that "This is the most stupid idea I have ever heard of. How can you stop defections like this? I wonder if they have the approval of the PM".

Most of us were left wondering about not just who approved this idiotic expedition, but who was paying for it. It was variously reported as being entirely funded by one person, or self-funded by each participant. But many commentators, I noticed, cynically predicted that, as usual with BN events, the public would foot the bill.

### **Flight to nowhere**

As to where the BN MPs were running away to, the first estimate I saw was Australia, then China became a possibility, and finally the organisers settled on Taiwan.

I was personally quite relieved when Australia was dropped from consideration, as we have enough low-life of our own down here without a contingent of BN MPs compounding the problem by possibly trying to import undeclared cash and claiming not to be able to read English.

China apparently fell out of contention because the appropriate visas couldn't be arranged at such short notice.

But why, of all places, Taiwan became the default destination of the "study tour", I have no idea.

oil palm plantationGiven that Malaysian agriculture seems to consist largely of oil palm, more oil palm and even more oil palm, why run off to a country whose principal farm products are, according to my quick Google search, rice, betel nuts, pineapples, mangoes, sugar cane, watermelons, tea, bamboo shoots, pears and peanuts?

And in any case, if the study is in any way serious, why send a bunch of slow-learners like BN MPs? If they're capable of becoming better informed, why not send them to study something that might improve their performance of their parliamentary duties, like good governance, say, or anti-corruption techniques or judicial, electoral and police reform?

Or, on the other hand, what about flying them off, as some bloggers suggested, to somewhere like Zimbabwe to see and experience for themselves the kind of agricultural economy Malaysia can look forward to if the government they're part of stays in power long enough?

All joking aside though, who cares where they go or what they pretend to study there, or even who's paying the bill, as long as the whole scam is a sure sign that PKR has the BN government on the run?

lim kit siang and dapAs Lim Kit Siang said in a statement the other day: "Despite maintaining a public stance of stoic indifference, there is no doubt that with the daily countdown to Sept 16, there is an increasing panic in Umno and BN leadership ranks over the degree of cohesion, solidarity and allegiance of the 75 BN backbenchers."

Lambasting BBC chairperson Tiong King Sing for "hatching such a stupid idea" as to treat MPs "like delinquent children who have to be packed off overseas and secluded from mischief," he made the very pertinent point that "If there are BN MPs who are minded to leave BN ... nothing can stop them from proceeding with their fateful decisions any time after their return to Malaysia after Sept 16."

Lim's absolutely right. Unless the runaways seek asylum in Taiwan, they'll fly home to face the choice of turning-over to PKR to help run the country better, or staying with a coalition whose ruinous monopoly on power has given it far too long a run for its – or rather the rakyat's – money.

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