

**Najib Scores Own Goal**  
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Prime minister Najib Abdul Razak, who is a staunch Manchester United supporter, should be familiar with soccer and "own goals". He scored one himself with his Peaceful Assembly Bill (PAB) 2011, which was tabled last week.

To add insult to injury, which is almost like being given a red card, Najib had to do a volte-face with his much touted PAB.

The PM was forced to instruct his Cabinet to review and amend the PAB. It was alleged that Najib had been overseas, when the PAB was presented to the Cabinet and hence was unable to make any useful contribution.

Political pundits are sceptical and said that Najib's well-worn excuse, when things fall apart, was to claim that he "was overseas".

The PM prides himself on being internet and media savvy and his latest delve into the digital age involves being the honorary commander of 2,000 cyber-troopers. His claim of being incommunicado with those who drafted the PAB is inexcusable.

Initially Najib had praised the PAB as a "revolutionary" law and likened it to a "giant leap" in Malaysia's political scene.

Embarrassingly for him, the only "revolution" was the revolt from various groups against the PAB. And the only "giant leap" is that of Najib and his Cabinet backtracking after seeing the volatile response to the PAB.

The backlash came from members of the public, including overseas Malaysians, which helped contradict the MCA's assertion that overseas Malaysians were out of touch. The others were civil society groups, politicians and lawyers.

All said that the PAB stripped the rakyat of their constitutional right to freedom of assembly. Furthermore, masked beneath the waffle of provisos, was the revelation that the police would be given unprecedented powers.

The Malaysian Bar agreed with Lawyers for Liberty with respect to the individual's constitutional rights, that the PAB was more restrictive than the present law. The Bar criticised the proposed prohibitions on "street protests" and stated that previous "street protests" had been peaceful.

The Malaysian Bar also claimed that during the consultative process between itself and the Attorney General's Chambers, the latter had withheld disclosing many provisions.

Insiders have claimed that the Cabinet is intent on banning street protests despite a review of the advance notice period.

Political pundits assert that the problem with Najib is that he reacts to the public, instead of being a pro-active leader.

Najib saw the outpouring of public sentiment during Bersih 2.0. His reaction was to ban future assemblies. He hastily produced the PAB, four months after the Bersih "March for democracy".

Many may recall that last week, Najib had also launched the "1Malaysia Social Media Volunteers" or "myVOICE" project. This battalion of cyber-troopers has been tasked with defending government policies online.

The internet can educate and inform the public, but it can also reveal crimes, corruption and scandals. During by-elections, the alternative media have experienced jamming by Najib's cyber-troopers, some of whom are based in the west and who are paid millions of ringgits.

Najib acts like a trapped animal. The PAB denies the rakyat, freedom of speech and expression. The heavy fines and arrest of individuals may disqualify some opposition MPs and politicians. The "myVOICE" program will result in journalists and media organisations being harassed and severely restricted.

Yesterday, Najib said that BN must be re-elected to enable his economic and political reforms to be pushed through.

He said, "Umno is arguably the most successful political party in a modern democracy.... Umno has to continue to reform, to reinvent itself so that it is seen as a dynamic party."

BN members were warned about being complacent: "The biggest challenge of being in power for so long is that you have a sense that you have this political power, almost invincibility... this is the danger we face."

For 54 years, very little was done to empower the people. Corruption, scandals, mysterious deaths in police or MACC custody and overspending by the BN government, had no effect on ousting BN from power.

Then, last July, things came to a head for Najib.

Bersih 2.0 made the image-conscious PM an overnight sensation with his brutal treatment of the peaceful marchers. This contrasted with the glossy image of Najib, promoted by overseas media companies.

But the exposé, by the opposition coalition and Sarawak Report, revealed that Najib had paid these companies hundreds of millions of ringgits from the public purse to churn out lies to improve his image.

Two lawyers, one French and the other British, were deported. William Bourdon was here for the Scorpene scandal and Imran Khan, came on a fact finding mission for Hindraf to investigate racism.

But it was the drip-drip revelations of electoral fraud which finally prompted Najib to offer to the rakyat his so-called reforms. But as the PAB has revealed, these reforms were "panic reactions".

The proposal to repeal the ISA was first announced last September but no information was divulged about the alternative new laws. There was no information because there was none

available. It was another reform mentioned in haste to appease us. Today, we have been told that the alternative laws include detention without trial. It is another ill-conceived reform.

Of course Najib wants BN to be re-elected so he and his cronies can continue to plunder the country without censure, and so that they can evade justice.

His so called reforms are just a gimmick and a knee-jerk reaction meant to distract us from the real danger of electoral fraud which he is pushing through on a massive scale. The end justifies the means. He wants to win, at all costs and by whatever methods, even if it means cheating.

And because of that, Najib, the football fan, should be banned for life for a series of cynical professional fouls.

### **MARIAM MOKHTAR**

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