

The case, the man, the fightback

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As Datuk Seri Najib Razak files an appeal against his SRC conviction, it will be worth observing the fightback from the man dubbed as a natural born political fighter.

DATUK Harun Idris was hailed by his supporters as “penyelamat bangsa Melayu” (the saviour of the Malay race). In any discourse on the concept of a Malay hero in the modern world, his name would certainly be mentioned.

Another leader, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, is one of the most charismatic Malay leaders the country has ever seen.

Both were charged in court and both were found guilty. Harun was convicted in 1975 and 1977, and Anwar in 2000 and 2014. Their convictions triggered a tidal wave of response among the Malays.

For their loyalists, the charges were a charade. It was politically motivated. The court was nothing more than the instrument of the ruling elite for their nefarious intent.

Anwar’s ouster as the Deputy Prime Minister in September 1998 and subsequently his imprisonment started a movement never seen before in the country.

His Reformasi Movement unsettled the government of the day. Anwar’s incarceration in 1998 resulted in the rise of a new breed

of politicians who never would have thought of joining politics, including his wife. Many of these “accidental politicians” are now redefining Malaysian politics.

In both cases, the government of the day called for calm. Allow the due process of law to take its course. Respect the decision of the court. Fast forward to July 28, the same people who once called for Anwar’s feverish supporters for calm are now behaving differently.

Many supporters of Datuk Seri Najib Razak are up in arms condemning the guilty verdict on the seven charges he faced. Like Harun and Anwar, Najib is a victim of perhaps another conspiracy of the highest order.

The fact that the outcome of the prosecution is one of the most anticipated not only locally but internationally is not important.

The company involved, SRC International is a subsidiary of 1MDB, a name that rhymes with infamy. 1MDB is believed to be the biggest financial scandal the world has ever known.

The money trail affected some of the best known financial institu-

tions the world over. The reverberations went beyond Malaysian shores.

Authorities in Asia, Europe and the United States were clamouring to understand the extent of the financial imbroglio.

Many individuals involved have been taken to court and found guilty as charged. The US Department of Justice (DOJ) was in the thick of things at one point, looking at the “thefts in three phases”.

The investigation by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) on SRC International itself wasn’t an easy one.

There was alleged interference to frustrate investigators. At one point, when two MACC officers involved in the investigation were abruptly transferred to the Prime Minister’s Department in 2015, the panel that I led, the Consultative and the Prevention Panel of the MACC came out with a strong statement to reinstate them. The people too were demanding for a transparent investigation.

But more importantly, despite gallant effort by Najib’s government to explain the mess, people had made up their mind in the 2018

general election. The Barisan Nasional government that Najib led was booted out.

On the personal level, Najib’s fightback was seen as one of the most intriguing in the history of the country.

“Malu Apa Bossku” (What is there to be ashamed of, My Boss)? became a slogan for him to reclaim his reputation. As hard as he fought on the personal level, he fought equally hard on the legal front.

We have yet to see the repercussion of the court’s decision politically. Whatever the move made by Umno would affect the fragile coalition led by Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

But for the Malays, there has been a fierce debate on the outcome of the case.

There was no social media during Harun’s time and the Internet was still in infancy when Anwar’s first case was tried.

Social media is alight with fire this time around. Najib’s detractors believed that it was unthinkable he would wriggle free from the mess he created.

On the other hand, many can’t

understand why would someone who is allegedly embroiled in such an act of deceit and misuse of power could still be hailed a hero. Whatever happened to the values of *kejujuran* (honesty) and *amanah* (responsibility), not to mention credibility and leadership, they asked.

For Najib, this is only the beginning. There are many more charges related to 1MDB that he will have to face. But for now he will appeal the conviction.

He will certainly exhaust all the legal recourse.

If he fails, he will languish in jail for 12 years, the first former prime minister to do so.

Knowing Najib, just like Harun and Anwar, the fightback is something worth observing. They are after all, natural born political fighters.

Johan Jaaffar was a journalist, editor and for some years chairman of a media company, and is passionate about all things literature and the arts. And a diehard rugby fan. The views expressed here are entirely his own.