



It's just politics

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DOES the stability of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's government hinge on whether former PM Datuk Seri Najib Razak receives a royal pardon?

It cuts both ways: Anwar is damned if he helps to pardon Najib, and damned if he doesn't.

On Friday, I received a flurry of queries about whether the Pardons Board, which is chaired by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah, would discuss Najib's application for a royal pardon on that day. My answer was that his name was not on the list up for review.

The former prime minister was jailed 250 days ago after the Federal Court upheld his conviction in the SRC International case on Aug 23 last year. The High Court had convicted him in July 2020 of abuse of power, money laundering and criminal breach of trust involving SRC funds amounting to RM42mil. He was sentenced to 12 years jail and fined RM210mil.

There is keen interest in this issue. Many are speculating about the fate of Najib's possible pardon.

The conventional wisdom is that Najib's political enemies

Who will help pardon Najib?

A former enemy could hold out a helping hand. Or perhaps assistance will come from those seeking to hold on to power.

want him to remain in jail, while Najib's supporters want him out. But in politics, who is an enemy and who is a friend shifts depending on common interest.

Will the Prime Minister help set Najib free?

Anwar's political interest is to remain Prime Minister, of course. For that to happen, he needs the support of Barisan Nasional's 30 MPs (26 from Umno, two from MCA and one each from MIC and Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah).

Despite being in jail, former Umno president Najib still has a considerable hold on his party. "Bossku", as he has been dubbed, has immense support in certain segments of the Malaysian population.

Let's look at the maths to see how crucial Barisan is in the numbers game.

The difference between Pakatan Harapan, led by Anwar, and Perikatan Nasional, the sole Opposition coalition, is nine MPs. Pakatan has 81 MPs while Perikatan has 74 MPs.

If Barisan withdraws its MPs, the unity government of 148 MPs will be reduced to 118. That's a slim majority of six MPs in the 222-seat Parliament.

If any six MPs from these combinations - Gabungan Parti Sarawak with 23 MPs, Gabungan Rakyat Sabah with six, Parti Warisan with three, two Independents, and one each from Parti Bangsa Malaysia, Parti Kesejahteraan Demokratik Masyarakat, and Muda - quit the government, Anwar will lose the premiership.

There's no guarantee that the smaller parties like GPS and GRS, or the independents, will continue to support Anwar.

The strange thing about this "unity" government is that it looks like it is not very united.



Possible saviours? Anwar (left) and Dr Mahathir both have reasons to help get Najib out of his current situation - but will they? - Photos: Filepics/The Star

A political content creator texted me a photograph of the double-decker bus the unity government launched to woo Kedah voters in the upcoming state polls: "Harapan logo. Barisan logo. But no Muda, Warisan, GRS, PBM, GPS or PBM logos. Is this a unity government? I wonder how the other partners feel at being left out," he said, referring to the logos on the "Malaysia Madani" bus.

Based on his political interest, it is logical for us to anticipate that Anwar will be compelled to help pardon Najib. Those in Pakatan who are against this move need to be more broad-minded and rationalise Anwar's precarious position and justification for a possible Najib pardon if they want their coalition to remain in power.

If Anwar does not help pardon Najib, is it the end for the 69-year-old politician sentenced to 12 years in jail?

Probably not. Twice-prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad might consider making an offer to Najib.

Dr Mahathir's political philosophy is that there are no permanent enemies and no permanent friends, only permanent interests. When he is in political trouble, he has a knack for seeking help from his enemies. For example, he embraced bitter rival DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang to topple Najib in 2018.

For Dr Mahathir, Najib is no longer a political threat as he is not an Umno president or an MP. Also, Najib is no longer Dr Mahathir's No.1 political enemy. Anwar has replaced him.

To bring down his No.1 political enemy, Dr Mahathir will need to work with Najib. So don't be surprised if Dr Mahathir visits Najib in court during one of the former Pekan MP's hearings.

If so, it would be *deja vu*.

On Sept 5, 2016, Dr Mahathir

turned up at the Kuala Lumpur High Court to attend the hearing of an application filed by then jailed Opposition leader Anwar to challenge the National Security Council (NSC) Act 2016.

It was the first time the two men met face-to-face in 18 years. Dr Mahathir shook hands with Anwar, who he sacked as deputy prime minister and Umno deputy president in 1998, paving the way for Anwar to be charged with sodomy and corruption later.

If Dr Mahathir joins forces with Najib, it will be a classic case of the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

So who will help to free Najib from jail? Will it be Anwar or Dr Mahathir?

The public must understand that some politicians view justice and honour in terms of their own power and interest. For them, it's all about security, not justice and honour.