

'Dirtiest' GE in the offing, warns ex-US envoy
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 12 — The 13th general election will be Malaysia's "dirtiest" in history as the country's corrupt are expected to exhaust all avenues to cling on to power, former US ambassador John R. Malott has predicted.

Writing in the Wall Street Journal today, Malott said although Datuk Seri Najib Razak may enjoy some goodwill following Monday's Sodomy II acquittal of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the prime minister's failure to address the numerous scandals engulfing several ministers may see him suffer some backlash.

Singling out the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) cattle scandal as an example, Malott added that it was these "weaknesses" in Najib's administration that "compound Umno's fear of losing power and increase the risk of over-reaction".

"The party will not go down without a fight, and neither will its supporters in the bureaucracy, media, and business worlds, who fear losing access to the financial gravy train.

"Because of the high stakes, those who benefit from corruption will make an all-out effort to keep the opposition from coming to power," Malott said in the prominent newspaper.

He added that despite Najib's promises for economic and electoral reform, the prime minister continues to be dogged by right-wing opposition from within his party, forcing him to shelve many of his policies.

"All this will make the coming election the most important in Malaysia's history — and also its dirtiest. A return to Mahathir-style strong-arm tactics should not be ruled out."

While Malott painted a bleak picture for Najib, his forecast on Anwar and Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) days ahead appeared brighter.

The former ambassador, who served in Malaysia from 1995 to 1998, predicted that should Umno fumble on its promises for electoral reform and squanders its "newly-earned goodwill" from Anwar's acquittal, the federal opposition would only grow in strength.

"The growing pains and ideological differences that plagued the opposition coalition in years past have largely been overcome, and Mr Anwar and his political associates express confidence that they could take power in a fair contest," Malott pointed out.

In the event the prosecution in Anwar's case decide to appeal the judge's "not guilty" verdict, Malott expects the move could cost the Najib administration the recent support of centrists and independents.

"The international community needs to pay attention and hold Mr Najib to his promise of

political and electoral reform. Mr Anwar's acquittal is only the beginning of the country's fight against political abuse and corruption," said Malott.

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