

Appeal fuels idea BN wants Anwar out, say analysts
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 21 — The decision to appeal against Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's acquittal in his two-year-long sodomy trial has boosted the notion that the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) will stop at nothing to end the opposition leader's political ambitions, say analysts.

Prosecutors filed an appeal yesterday although trial judge Datuk Mohd Zabidin Mohd Diah ruled they had not done enough and that DNA evidence may have been compromised when finding Anwar not guilty of sodomising his former aide, Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan.

"Most Malaysians have grown so cynical over the unrelenting series of criminal charges brought against Anwar, that the proposition (that BN wants to stop Anwar) is the most natural and compelling inference to be drawn," Bar Council president Lim Chee Wee told The Malaysian Insider.

He also questioned why Solicitor-General II Datuk Mohd Yusof Zainal Abiden — "the third most important man in the Attorney General's Chambers" — should spend his time "prosecuting this crime which is victimless and based on morality" instead of more serious offences such as corruption and murder.

James Chin, a political science lecturer at Monash University, told AP that the move reflects negatively on Datuk Seri Najib Razak's claims that he does not interfere with the judiciary and is serious about ensuring civil liberty.

"It's back to square one. It is a setback for Anwar because he will have to spend time in the appeal process and won't be able to focus fully on forthcoming elections," he said.

Ibrahim Suffian of independent pollsters Merdeka Center also told Reuters "the appeal by the prosecution plays into the opposition story that the government will not stop at anything to get rid of the Anwar politically."

"It also clouds Prime Minister Najib's reforms at this crucial time before an election. Like it or not, Malaysians tend to feel that the government is behind this [trial]," he said.

The opposition, especially Anwar himself, has campaigned hard across the country ever since Saiful first made the accusation in June 2008, claiming the allegation is a political ploy to end Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) hopes of coming into power.

But the government failed to seize the opportunity given by the High Court here to "bow out gracefully from Anwar's politically motivated prosecution," said Human Rights Watch.

"This decision means the citizens of Malaysia will be further subjected to the more political machinations in the courtroom as the government perpetuates this travesty of a trial for a crime that should not be a crime in the first place," said the human rights watchdog's deputy Asia chief Phil Robertson.

Anwar, 64, was similarly indicted of sodomy in 1998, before being exonerated six years later.

The PKR de facto leader then led the PR opposition pact to deny BN its customary two-third majority of Parliament and five state governments.

Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan, chairman of electoral reforms movement Bersih, believes the Najib administration's move may prove to be counterproductive.

"Any goodwill they may have gained by the acquittal now down the drain with this appeal. Pity!" she said on micro-blogging site Twitter yesterday.

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