

**Najib ceding to Umno hawks over court appeals, says Pakatan**  
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**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 21 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak is “painting himself into a corner” with the government’s latest court pursuit of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Karpal Singh, in what Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders say were moves designed to placate the hardliners in Umno.

Yesterday, public prosecutors filed to appeal against Anwar’s high-profile acquittal from a charge of sodomy, the same day the Court of Appeal reversed Karpal’s acquittal from a sedition charge and ordered the latter to enter his defence.

Anwar and Karpal are senior leaders in the three-party opposition PR bloc. Anwar is seen to be Najib’s political arch-foe in their scramble for Putrajaya in the next elections.

In Malaysia, the Attorney-General has sole discretion on prosecutions, but Najib’s Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, which has held power for over 50 years, is seen to wield much influence on the bureaucracy.

“Najib has given up the opportunity to move on and engage the middle ground. By giving up other vote banks, he is narrowing his appeal and painting himself into a corner,” DAP strategist Liew Chin Tong told The Malaysian Insider.

Calling yesterday’s developments a “double whammy” for the opposition, the Bukit Bendera MP said both Anwar’s sodomy charge and the trial over whether Karpal uttered seditious words against the Perak Sultan was geared to secure the conservative Malay vote.

PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli added that the two cases discredits the prime minister’s image as a political reformist and paints him as a weak and indecisive leader.

“Time and again, he will announce reforms only to backpedal. Now the warlords in Umno will say, ‘Don’t worry about Najib. He will back down and even overcompensate,’” he said.

Umno is the lynchpin party in the 13-member BN coalition.

The ruling BN had made the case that Anwar’s acquittal on January 9 not only showed the courts were free from manipulation but was also an extension of Najib’s reforms push.

Karpal had been indicted under Section 4(1) of the Sedition Act 1948 for allegedly uttering seditious words against the Perak Sultan by saying the removal of Datuk Seri Mohamad Nizar Jamaluddin as Perak menteri besar and the appointment of Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir by the Sultan could be questioned in a court of law.

Karpal was later acquitted of the charges by trial judge Azman Abdullah. The A-G’s Chambers subsequently filed its appeal last year, contending that the judge had taken a wrong approach when he ruled the prosecution had failed to prove prima facie.

Najib has unveiled several transformation programmes after coming into power in April 2009, including the Economic Transformation Programme that seeks to liberalise the economy.

But after two rounds of liberalisation to allow more foreign equity in the services sector, pro-Bumiputera quotas remain.

Despite the continuation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) that was due to expire in 1990, Najib also went on to introduce a new unit, Teraju, to enhance Bumiputera economic participation.

The RM50 billion Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit project saw 43 per cent (instead of the usual 30 per cent quota) of civil engineering projects being set aside for Bumiputera contractors after they complained of being shut out by strict pre-qualification criteria.

PAS research chief Dzulkefly Ahmad also said yesterday's developments in court showed an incoherence in Najib's announcements and his administration's actions.

"This script of one step forwards, two steps back is getting predictable and all too familiar," the Kuala Selangor MP said.

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