

## **Winners and losers in Sodomy 2**

### **The Malaysian Insider**

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Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will start a five-year imprisonment after his appeal against conviction and sentence for sodomy was dismissed by the Federal Court in Putrajaya today.

His second sodomy case starting in 2008 did not attract the crowds that surged in his 1998 case but support has grown for the sacked deputy prime minister and his Pakatan Rakyat (PR) coalition in the intervening years.

Despite his sodomy charge, Anwar and PR raked in more supporters among the electorate in the 2013 polls, taking in 52% of the popular vote and again denying the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) of its two-thirds parliamentary super-majority.

Here is The Malaysian Insider's view of the winners and losers from today's decision by the five-man bench of the Federal Court.

### **WINNERS**

#### **1. Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad**

Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister sacked Anwar in 1998, ostensibly on sodomy and power abuse charges, although it was widely seen as a move to preempt a party coup.

Since then Anwar has been Dr Mahathir's (pic) number one political enemy, and was jailed for six years in 1999. Anwar was acquitted in 2004 when Dr Mahathir's successor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was in power.

Anwar and his allies broke BN's hold in the 2008 and 2013 polls, threatening Dr Mahathir's legacy and putting him in contention as a future prime minister. His latest conviction and imprisonment has all but ensured he will not be PM.

It also paves the way for Dr Mahathir to remain focused on his campaign to keep Umno in power, which includes removing leaders whom he feels are unsuitable to lead the party.

#### **2. Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah**

The Umno lawyer was named to lead the prosecution's appeal against Anwar's acquittal of committing sodomy by the High Court in 2012. He successfully led the prosecution in both appeals at the Court of Appeal and the Federal Court.

Shafee (pic, left)) won both, although his star dimmed recently over a Home Minister's letter vouching for the integrity of his client Paul Phua, who is facing

charges in the United States with running a World Cup football online betting ring.

There has been speculation that a victory against Anwar will strengthen Shafee's chance of becoming the Attorney-General once incumbent Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail retires from office this year.

### **3. Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang**

The PAS president has never sat easy with Anwar in a rivalry that goes back to their days in the Islamist student group Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Abim) in the late 1970s.

Politically, they were divided too with Hadi joining PAS in 1978 and Anwar joining Umno in 1982. Anwar progressed in Umno and the government under Dr Mahathir's mentorship until 1998 when he was sacked.

That sacking reunited the duo against Umno but the rivalry and Anwar's ease at handling both international and domestic politics have always put Hadi (pic, right) a step behind.

The Selangor leadership change called the Kajang Move saw Hadi refusing to play ball with Anwar's PKR and the DAP resulting in several months of impasse and frosty ties.

With Anwar in jail, the ultra-conservative Hadi can exert a greater influence over PR which is likely to be led by PKR president Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah in the interim.

## **LOSERS**

### **1. Malaysia**

The country of 30 million people is further divided after two divisive elections, and two sodomy trials involving Anwar over the past 17 years.

Although the crowds have thinned since Anwar's 1999 sodomy conviction, more people have voted for his opposition alliance than ever before in the past two elections.

His latest sodomy conviction adds to the growing gloom in a country that is facing lower revenues from falling oil and palm oil prices apart from a weaker currency. Uncertainty over strategic investor 1MDB's financials have further clouded the country's economy even as people brace for an unpopular consumption tax.

The latest Anwar sodomy verdict has also put the spotlight back on Malaysia's judiciary and its judgments although Putrajaya took just 10 minutes today to insist the judiciary remains independent of the executive.

### **2. Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim**

He might say he continues to fight the good fight but the popular politician turns 68 in August and any early release will only come in 40 months when he is at least 71.

And with a further five-year bar at the end of his jail term from contesting in any election, Anwar can only legally run for public office when he is 76.

In other words, the latest jail sentence has all but killed his political prospects.

### **3. Datuk Seri Najib Razak**

For the prime minister, there is no equal in Umno or BN to take him on. He might be unpopular and performed worse than Abdullah at the polls but he remains the only viable leader in the ruling coalition.

His only adversary has always been Anwar, who led Najib and others as the Team Wawasan in the 1993 Umno party polls.

But an imprisoned Anwar now makes Najib a sitting duck for Dr Mahathir's ire and growing disenchantment with the prime minister's social and economic policies apart from the debt-heavy 1MDB impacting the government.

On the international scene, today's Anwar verdict will draw further criticisms from world leaders who have been impressed with Najib's moderate Islam credentials. They have been worried about his volte face over sedition laws but the Anwar decision will further erode their trust in the prime minister's reform agenda.

Najib will also have to take into account the verdict's impact when he next leads BN at the polls. The sodomy charge that hung over Anwar only attracted more votes in 2013 and his imprisonment now can only get the opposition even more votes.

### **4. Umno and Barisan Nasional**

The perceived injustice over the Anwar verdict, and the lack of action and long imprisonment for government figures said to be corrupt, will only push people away from Umno and the other BN parties.

Umno itself suffers from warlords who want to keep power and push away young and capable politicians from running for office in the party or government. The Anwar verdict will only attract them to join PR and move up faster through the ranks.

It is the same with other BN component parties, where infighting and old leaders' reluctance to give way to younger members will only push away Malaysians who are conscious of their rights and able to exert more influence through social media.

As it is, the DAP and PKR have recruited younger members at the expense of Umno and its allies. The Anwar verdict will exacerbate the exodus to PR and hasten the death of non-Malay parties in BN. – February 10, 2015.

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