

**Anwar runs out of options**  
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**Simon Elegant**

He may have been wheelchair bound, gaunt and pale after almost four years in prison, but Malaysia's former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim had lost none of his fire when he appeared in the country's highest court on July 10 to make a last-chance bid for freedom. In proceedings lasting barely 20 minutes, Chief Justice Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah announced the court had unanimously rejected Anwar's final appeal against his conviction and six-year sentence for tampering with a police investigation. In response, the 54-year old Anwar lashed out at his persecutors, calling the decision a "horrendous betrayal of the public confidence in the judiciary ... a perversion of the rule of law" and a plunge into "the pit of infamy."

Anwar, who is also serving a consecutive nine-year term for sodomy, repeated his assertion that the two trials were rigged on orders from his former mentor, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, a charge the premier has consistently denied. With no avenue of appeal left barring a highly unlikely royal pardon, Anwar now seems fated to serve out his full sentence. With good behavior, his lawyer says, he could be released in 2009, by which time the political landscape should be transformed, Mahathir pattering happily in retirement, his successor firmly ensconced and Anwar himself simply irrelevant. But as his passionate court performance showed, Anwar is unlikely to go quietly into the night upon release. Malaysia doesn't conduct opinion polls, but some Kuala Lumpur pundits say large numbers of Malaysians remain uneasy about the conduct and fairness of the Anwar trials. "However much the ruling party tries to pretend he doesn't exist," says political science professor P. Ramasamy, "more and more people in Malaysia regard Anwar as a political prisoner. Until they deal with that, he will continue to haunt the government and the country."

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