

In Malaysia, a foregone conviction
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In a verdict with about as much credibility, even in Malaysia, as the O.J. acquittal, former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim was convicted of corruption Wednesday and sentenced to six years in prison. He still faces another corruption charge and five counts of sodomy. Long the West's darling on economic issues and the leader of Malaysia's reformasi movement, Anwar is now barred from politics for 11 years, and serves as a dire warning to anyone with thoughts of succeeding aging Prime Minister Mahathir when he finally steps down. And when that happens, says TIME correspondent William Dowell, Malaysia is due for a long season of political and economic chaos.

"Anwar would have guaranteed a fluid transition to an administration that foreign investors would have found credible," he says. "But by using the judiciary to crush Anwar as soon as he emerged as a worthy successor, Mahathir's egotism now is setting up instability later." No one knows for sure whether Anwar was actually guilty. Some of the charges are rather obvious fabrications; others, says Dowell, are not far beyond what any number of Malaysian officials are up to on a daily basis. Anwar was arrested because of his ambition, and the conclusion was foregone. After the ruling was handed down Wednesday by High Court Judge (and one-man jury) Augustine Paul, Anwar turned to reporters, every inch the martyr, and shrugged. "Are you surprised?" he said. "I'm not."

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