

**Malaysia: sex, lies and economics**  
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**Frank Pellegrini**

Malaysian prime minister Mahathir wanted to teach the West a lesson about economics. Instead, East Asia's most irrepressible autocrat is showing Americans how not to manage a sex scandal -- hard though that may be to imagine.

It started last week when Mahathir fired his ambitious deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, in a dispute over economic policy, and then had him arrested for what appeared to be trumped-up charges of adultery, sodomy and bestiality. By Tuesday, the incident seemed ready to blow up in the prime minister's face. Amid protests by furious Anwar supporters, police surrounded the jailed deputy's home, threatening to arrest Anwar's wife for telling reporters that authorities had injected her husband with the AIDS virus during his detention.

"If Mahathir had just fired him, he probably would have prevailed," says TIME senior foreign correspondent Johanna McGeary. "Instead, he's made a martyr of him." McGeary points out that it was similar social unrest that toppled President Suharto in Indonesia. Mahathir said at the time that the IMF was responsible for that uprising. This time, he's got no one to blame but himself.

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