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Keadilan-Sabah (News Analysis)

EACH SPEAKER FOCUSES ON ONE TOPIC AT POLITICAL GATHERING

By: Jackson Sawatan

KOTA KINABALU, Aug 15 (Bernama) -- A man who claimed to be a Barisan Nasional supporter at the official launching of Parti Keadilan Nasional in Sabah over the weekend said he noticed a feature that made the function quite different from several other political gatherings he had been attending in the country.

"One thing about this party is that they arranged their speeches in such a way that certain speaker will speak only on a certain issue...there was no overlapping of subjects between the speakers, so people will not be bored," he said.

At the function, Vice President Tian Chua, who spoke in the national language, Chinese, and English outlined the party's struggle while Information Chief Ruslan Kassim concentrated on criticising public policies.

Youth leader Mohamed Ezam Mohamed Noor on the other hand, dwelt on cronyism in general and why the people should put a stop to it.

The last speaker was Keadilan President Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail in which she related an incident on the night her husband Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was arrested by the police.

She went on explaining the party's struggle "to bring about justice" and at the end of her speech, she conveyed the party's stand on certain issues relating to the rights of Sabah and Sarawak in the Federation of Malaysia.

But the orderly manner in which the party arranged their presentation was the only compliment the man could say about the party.

In the end the man who had actively campaigned for the Barisan Nasional during the past four Sabah elections and three general elections, conceded that despite the presence of a capacity crowd at Hongkod Koisaan, here, Keadilan would face an uphill task to win over the people in Sabah.

"It may win their heart over the plight of Azizah but not their minds," he said.

After Dr Wan Azizah finished her speech the crowd started leaving the 2,500-capacity hall in a great hurry. Some stayed back to shake hands with her as she walked to her car.

Cronyism and neoptism and the like and also the the party's rally cry "reformasi" -- have not been propagated at all by state-based opposition parties even at the height of their campaign against the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government in the March 12-13 state election.

Even the main opposition party, Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), chose to distance itself from such issues.

State politics appear to dwell on subjects such as state rights, party-hopping, illegal immigrants, rural development as well as the existence of phantom voters.

Even while fighting hard to unseat the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) in Sabah during the state election, the local parties did not mount any direct or personal attack on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and so the local people became uneasy when Keadilan leaders did just that here over the weekend.

Hence it was not surprising really when PBS seemingly disassociated itself from what the Keadilan said about the country's leadership.

For example, Bingkor Assemblyman Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, although vocal in his criticism especially of the state government, chose to limit

his comments.

"I welcome the statement by the Keadilan President on Sabah's rights such as in the area of immigration, oil royalty and opportunities for locals to hold Federal posts including in the diplomatic service," he said.

Describing Keadilan's policies on Sabah as positive, Dr Jeffrey said these should be supported by the people in the state.

"I wish to stress that while I support Keadilan's policies, I do not support the party itself!"

But what Keadilan said on Sabah constituted only about five percent of the whole of its Sunday affair with the local people.

After more than three hours of government-bashing, Keadilan's policies on Sabah were only revealed at the very last minutes when the Keadilan President touched briefly on the party's stand on the state.

Some of the issues like the need for a referendum to determine whether the Sabah people preferred Labuan to remain a Federal Territory were only mentioned in a written statement distributed to the press later.

But then the question of Labuan was no longer an issue in Sabah according to Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam.

Perhaps the one similarity between Keadilan and the Sabah-based parties is their common goal of trying to deny the BN a two-third majority in the Dewan Rakyat.

Keadilan Deputy President Dr Chandra Muzaffar had indicated his party's intention to contest in Sabah in the General Election, a move that may not please the PBS.

"We will prefer the Keadilan to concentrate its attention in the peninsula and we will focus on Sabah," PBS President Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan said.

-- BERNAMA

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