

**BN's early election plan in disarray**  
**MalaysiaKini.com**  
**Disember 27,2011**  
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COMMENT During the last few months, Prime Minister Najib Razak has been pulling out one pre-election carrot after another from his inexhaustible supply of goodies aimed at persuading the electorate to vote BN's way in the coming general election.

These range from indefinite postponement of the long-delayed goods and services tax to financial grants and other handouts to Chinese, Tamil and Islamic religious schools as well as politically strategic groups including Felda settlers, Indian small entrepreneurs, low income communities, and *imams* and *Kafa* (religious) teachers.

Najib's backroom boys must have been supremely confident that this mass saturation of money and handouts - so effective in past elections - would pave the way for a resounding victory as they plot the timing of the election.

Two recent developments appear to have now derailed the BN's plans for an early election to take advantage of the 'feel good' sentiments generated by the deluge of monetary incentives disbursed under the glare of fawning media coverage.

One is the spreading cloud of corruption and political irresponsibility associated with the National Feedlot Corporation's (NFC) scandal-ridden project.

This is not only likely to result in Sharizat Jalil's (*right*) resignation very soon but is also causing consternation and reverberations among Umno's grassroots members and supporters in the Malay heartland.

The arrogance and contempt displayed by Sharizat who received loud applause from Wanita Umno delegates for her bellicose speech will not be easily forgotten.

If the general election is called during the next several months when the cattle-gate case reaches its expected climax, Malaysians going into the voting booths will not only have indelible ink on their fingers; they will also go in with the overpowering and indelible stench of the NFC fiasco influencing their choice of parties.

The other development is one which the prime minister's think tanks and cronies high up in the civil service must be kicking themselves over.

The introduction of a new improved salary scheme for the country's 1.4 million civil servants was to be the main game changer in the 13th general election.

With a majority of the country's voters coming from civil servant or ex-civil servant households -perhaps 60 percent or more of the electorate - it is easy to understand why the roll-out of the new scheme was timed to take place just before the election.

Its successful implementation would reinforce the BN's image as a government with the best interests of the civil service constituency at heart.

It is possible that if given the thumbs up by the majority of civil servants, the new salary scheme could have affected the outcome in many marginal constituencies where the civil service vote is critical to tilt in favour of the BN candidates.

It is no exaggeration to say that civil service voters comprise the king makers in the country and that any aspiring government has to pay special attention to courting and winning this massive block of votes.

Devil in the remuneration details

The new public service remuneration scheme (SBPA) is to take effect in January 2012.

The Public Services Commission rushed its introduction without providing full details of the SBPA key components and without adequate consultations with stakeholders.

It was not surprising that the civil service trade union Cuepacs initially refused to be bulldozed into acceptance of what is now clearly emerging as “a half-baked cake” with the icing of 7-13 percent salary increases prominently displayed but resting on a soggy base.

Among the scheme’s shortcomings is the lop-sided salary increase that favours the top echelon. One civil servant compared the impact of the new scheme on lower and higher rank staff.

According to him: “I am a civil servant at Grade E48, and reached my ceiling five years ago. Under the proposed new scheme (SBPA), I am told I will get 7 percent increase. Overall, the quantum of increase is from 7-13 per cent.

“Now, the question I want to ask is: why do those in the Jusa category get up to 100 percent increase? They are already enjoying super-high salaries plus very generous allowances.

“Under the existing scheme, they are getting no less than RM13,000 (salary + allowances) and the move to increase their basic salary by 100 percent (or even more in some of the Jusa grades) will mean their take-home pay + allowances will exceed RM20,000.

Lack of transparency

“And most of the time, these super-duper civil servants only act as ‘postmen’ in passing all the hardwork and report-writing to their juniors.

“It is not fair at all. The Jusa people at PSD are rewarding themselves and throwing crumbs to the rest of the lower echelons of the civil service.”

Other concerns relate to the lack of consistency in grade improvement under the new scheme; lack of transparency in promotion exercises; and risks to civil service tenure arising from the implementation of KPIs.

In the latest development, the government has agreed to a two-week postponement in the implementation of the new scheme. Following the prime minister’s intervention, the PSD and Cuepacs met on Dec 23.

Cuepacs president Omar Osman (*left*) has since gone on record that all outstanding concerns involving SBPA have been resolved.

Earlier, according to *Bernama*, the Cuepacs president had stated that some civil servants were unhappy with the upgrading and the salary increase because they claimed that the hike was too small.

He also queried: "The grade improvement under the SBPA scheme is not consistent. There are improvements in some grades but not in others. Why is there an increase for some but not for others?"

Further details of how the contentious issues have been resolved are still to be unveiled. It is surprising that the Cuepacs leadership has been able - in the course of a single meeting - to resolve all concerns.

This, however, will not quell the resentment amongst the lower level staff on their small quantum of salary rise and the increasing income inequalities between themselves and higher level officers. Such discontent is bound to simmer and may boil over during the coming election.

Both Cowgate and the salaries issues are likely to send Najib's political strategists back to the drawing board in terms of picking a date for the polls.

We can expect a barrage of political corrective actions now to pacify the electorate and a delay in the elections.

Whether this delay will make any difference to the election outcome with an increasingly sophisticated electorate cynical of electoral spinning and dirty tricks is the burning question.

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