

GE13: It's a Fat Cats vs Joe Public battle
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By Terence Netto

COMMENT There you have it - the immediate prelude to the 13th general election has come down, at least for one side, to a neat summary of what the contest is all about: It's a battle between plutocrats and egalitarians, says Pakatan Rakyat's Anwar Ibrahim.

The Pakatan campaigner-in-chief hammered away at this theme at several ceramah the week just past, feeding a penchant for catchy summation on the part of the pen-and-recorder crowd.

"This battle, this election is about the masses, the workers, the low-income earners against the rich cronies of Umno," Anwar thundered to a ceramah in Ampang earlier this week.

BN has not yet come up with a compelling summary of their view of the stakes involved in GE13.

NONThe closest they have is by describing themselves as 'BN - Hak Milik Semua' (BN - Yours and Mine), a rather difficult to stick slogan when you have at least two BN ministers disclaiming responsibility for the conduct of members of their family after the latter got into scrapes or messed up with public funds.

An atomised conception of responsibility does not sit well with a self-defining slogan that is expansive in sweep.

If the soon-to-quit Women, Family and Community Development Minister Shahrizat Abdul Jalil and de facto law minister Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz attenuate themselves from knowledge and responsibility for the actions of their family members, the slogan 'BN - Hak Milik Semua' would appear more than a little dog-eared.

Going the full distance

This divergence between self-conception and reality would be worse when you consider the BN attitude to the state of their business cronies' corporate concerns: the latter's debts are often socialised while their profits remain privatised.

It cannot be a 'mine and yours' government when responsibility for kindred actions is easily disavowed while crony debts are the community's even as profits are their preserve.

Suffice, Pakatan are the runaway leaders over BN in the race to make their respective slogans resonate with voters.

anwar ceramah in melaka 040112Admittedly, Pakatan's 'Ubah' (Change) has no frills to commend it, being plainspoken and humdrum.

But the slogan connects viscerally with the realities out there in the public arena where, almost on a weekly basis, there are reports of and incidents reflecting BN malfeasance.

Sure, it's easy for Pakatan to shout for change but their calls are not hollow when placed against the backdrop of the coalition's performance in the states they control.

DAP's Lim Guan Eng's steering of Penang and PKR's Khalid Ibrahim's stewardship of Selangor, with each passing year, are projecting the merits of their administration in respect of benefits for their residents from increased investment, and cleaner governance issuing in a higher surplus of income over expenditure which is then ploughed back to the people.

Little wonder both state governments want to go the full distance of their tenure because the longer they trod the same path of frugality, clean governance and communitarian welfare, the more certain the voter will be against reversion to the BN status quo ante.

Running into headwinds

Which brings us to the question of when Prime Minister Najib Razak would call for the general election.

He seems to be dithering about the date though in the last week or so, he has been dropping broad hints that it is imminent.

The underlying realities are that the BN cannot count on a confluence of factors obtaining for it a propitious time to go to the polls.

Too much is happening on the downside for them to ever be certain that their disbursement of handouts to the have-nots would tide them over the downward drag of serial scandals that undermine Najib's claim that he is an earnest reformer, not an erstwhile one.

The longer he waits, the more certain he is to run into the headwinds of scandalous disclosure and entrenched decadence.

Anticipated disclosures from an ongoing inquiry in France about an arms procurement order when he was defence minister and mounting public pressure for a tribunal on the conduct of the attorney-general and the former inspector-general of police for alleged misdeeds five years ago will tighten like a noose around his neck.

Without a rallying slogan as compelling as the opposition's, with a track record of ambiguous merit, and with the downdraft of scandal tugging away at his government, waiting for a propitious time to call the polls is like a damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't proposition for Najib.

Perhaps, in offering during his visit to Burma earlier this week Malaysia's expertise in development economics, he had asked in return for some advice in how the regime's No 1, Than Shwe, had broken the junta's resistance to reform.

If it was 'Be brave, break through, and leave for the unknown' it would have fallen on deaf ears, because the Malaysian PM is not known for intrepidity, the surgical or the risky.

Meanwhile, the opposition Pakatan exploits the gift of a vivid slogan to the hilt.

