

GE13 presents clear choice to voters
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COMMENT While no one is certain in which month the 13th general election will be held, there is now little uncertainty about the essences of the manifestoes of the competing coalitions.

It's an appropriative capitalism with occasional handouts for the hard-up that characterises the Umno-BN platform, while the Pakatan Rakyat manifesto, as demonstrated by their governments in Penang and Selangor, is manifestly social democratic.

If we don't know when the election will be held - only that it must be held by May next year - at least we do know the essence of each coalition's socio-economic platform.

NONE In that sense, the GE13 will be unique in presenting voters with the clearest choice Malaysians have ever had about the essential systems they are called upon to prefer.

In a nutshell, the choice boils down to the appropriative capitalism cushioned by periodic handouts to the poor of BN versus the preferential option for the poor that Pakatan says it will always exercise.

If statistics have shown that 60 percent of Malaysian households exist on RM1,500 a month, the majority of voters ought to plumb for Pakatan unless of course they do not know the difference between the choices presented, or are bribed to vote against their grain, or are skeptical of Pakatan's capacity to deliver.

The latest bone of contention between the competing coalitions that has helped crystallise their positions into the near diametric opposites that they are concerns the higher education loans given out to students.

What is presently owed the government by students who have taken loans is RM43 billion.

BN say it would be fiscal madness to write-off the debt while Pakatan claims that they their clean governance, pruning of colossal waste, rejection of featherbedding for cronies, and general frugality will enable them to annul the debt in a matter of a few years.

Can Pakatan be believed?

Surpluses in Selangor and Penang

Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng's administration in Penang has trimmed inherited state government debt of RM600 million-plus to just RM30 million in a matter of four years, while Khalid Ibrahim's steering in Selangor has netted an excess in revenue over expenditure of RM1.9 billion last year.

NONE It was the economist in Khalid (far right) who had claimed when he was the PKR candidate for the Ijok by-election in April 2007 that for every ringgit that the BN administration spent, there was a ringgit misappropriated.

He has impliedly supplied the proof of this assertion by the economies he has applied to his administration which have yielded in a surplus of no mean proportions.

By their application of Pakatan-enunciated principles of governance, the surpluses Lim and Khalid have netted for their administrations after providing for welfare benefits extended to Penangites and Selangorians, are not to be sneered at.

Their administrations are manifestly social democratic, giving credence to Pakatan claims that at the federal level, their governance would be an elaboration and a deepening of the models in Penang and Selangor.

In fact, when Pakatan's Mohd Nizar Jamaluddin held the reins over a brief period in Perak, between March 2008 and February 2009, the main thrust of his administration was social democratic.

His willingness to give land to small farmers who have been cultivating their plots over a period of some 40 years was the most popular of the measures he shaped to undertake before his government was deposed by dubious means.

A Pakatan prototype

In the social sphere, Nizar's actions were so compellingly inclusive that though he was from PAS, a minority component of the Pakatan cohort in the Perak legislative assembly, his popular appeal cut across racial and religious lines.

cartoon-o-phobia launch nizar jamaludin speakingIt is widely surmised his popular appeal was far too threatening to the federal powers-that-be in what it evinced of Pakatan's capacity to uncork from within its ranks leaders of instinctive righteousness and panache; hence, they had to contrive to get rid of him and quickly too.

Sure, one casts a glance at the miscues of PAS' Azizan Abdul Razak in Kedah and hedges the bets about Nizar's example being a Pakatan prototype rather than merely fortuitous.

But then you have the examples of Lim and Khalid to contend with if one claims that Nizar's governance was one swallow that did not make a summer.

On balance, the social democratic thrust of Pakatan's manifesto has been adumbrated by the state administrations of Nizar, when he held sway in Perak, of Lim in Penang and of Khalid in Selangor such that the Pakatan promise of its elaboration at the federal level is now highly credible.

It makes Pakatan's willingness to write-off the higher education loans taken by students and the promise of free education from primary to tertiary levels no pie-in-the-sky assurances but the attainable goals of a social democracy for a nation of much natural endowment long squandered by callously profligate leadership.

