

## **BN's age shows up as stark defect**

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As one-line putdowns go, this one does not exactly pack a lot of panache but for reason it dovetails nicely with the mood of the times, DAP MP M Kulasegaran's "Fifty-five is the age when most people retire, why then won't we retire the BN?" would stand out in the relentless volleys and clichéd exchanges of an intensifying polls campaign.

Shed at a PKR-organised ceramah in Rawang last night, the teaser was not likely to fly among the 600-odd factory hands and labourers who came to the function from the industrial estates that have mushroomed around the spine of a single main street town that used to be the northern exit of the Klang Valley.

The reason: the largely working class audience knows that while the retirement age is going up in Malaysia, their pockets are far too shallow to look at the prospect of, even, a deferred retirement as a time to relax.

"You can't enjoy your retirement if corruption goes on unchecked and the country's debt goes up and up," said Kulasegaran (left), the Ipoh Barat parliamentary rep, warming to his theme that Umno-BN profligacy boded ill for the common person.

"Not only will the value of what you earn go down but also the national debt will have to be paid off by your children, perhaps even your grandchildren," emphasised the federal legislator who is national vice-chairman of the DAP.

The look on the weather-beaten faces of the crowd grew more grave as the litany of national woes was recited by a slew of speakers - mainly MPs and state representatives - from PKR and DAP who attended the gathering at a multi-purpose hall off the 17th mile Kuala Lumpur-Ipoh trunk road.

Kulasegaran's and other speakers' warnings of hard times to come seem to be getting across to working class audiences at opposition ceramah these days, thanks in part to the strong pamphlet campaign that derisively targets the pet themes and slogans of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's administration.

The 'Satu Malaysia' ('One Malaysia') catchphrase of the BN transliterates easily as 'Sapu Malaysia' ('Beggar Malaysia'), the bite of satire more easily conveyed by the Bahasa rendition than by the English version.

It does go down effectively with audiences even if they have only a rudimentary understanding of the national language, for colloquial Bahasa is so pervasive these days that even the unlettered thrill to its rhythmic cadences.

Mahathir's grabbing of straw

Vicarious thrills dispensed by clever Pakatan Rakyat speakers at ceramah are one thing, actual votes to dethrone the BN are another.

But it is becoming increasingly clear that the longer Najib dithers over dissolution of Parliament and delays calling for a vote, the more people are going to see the age of the ruling coalition (55) as a liability.

This is the more likely to happen if, in the intervening time to a deferred election, more scandals in government are unearthed and more jostling to become candidates on the BN slate is seen as taking place.

The evidence of mounting scandal and of intramural competitive spite will have the effect of making the opposition's steady focus on BN malfeasance more telling in conveying the point that the old creature has indeed become irredeemably long in the tooth.

This is not all the insidiousness at work.

Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad's grabbing at any straw with which to beat the opposition has now become so pathetic that he seems like a mangy old dog, whining and yelping at the merest rustle outside the gates of its territory.

Deferred retirement for a man of Mahathir's hitherto admirable industry now seems like a blessing that has boomeranged.

The wailing and gnashing of teeth evident in his latest rant against the opposition and its supporters among the Malays in yesterday's edition of Umno's shrill propaganda sheet, *Mingguan Malaysia*, suggest that he is close to coming off the hinges.

Not only is it at odds with the tenor of his repeated recent predictions of a BN victory at the polls, it suggests the man is worse than senile.

A curmudgeon we can all tolerate; a cur we can't help but want to put out of its misery.

Charles de Gaulle famously observed that old age is a shipwreck. In Mahathir and what he had wrought for Umno-BN, it makes euthanasia a commendable proposition.