'What BN gives, it will take away'
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No doubt the biggest highlight of the BN Manifesto, launched on April 6, was the increase of BR1M from RM500 to RM1,200 for every household earning less than RM3000 per month, estimated to represent 80 percent of total Malaysian households.

The statistic - 80 percent of Malaysian households or 5.2 million families earning less than RM3,000 a month, comes from BN's own website glorifying the objectives of BR1M.

Does BN not realise that BR1M is a manifestation of its failure to uplift Malaysian families out of this low income trap?

By touting its "noble" BR1M handouts and promising to make it an annual payment for years to come, BN is sending a conflicting message to the people - how can a country striving to achieve high income status still need to rely on a RM100 per month handout for 80 percent of its households?

The BN government has been running on deficits for the past 15 years, with a disproportionate of its revenue (40 percent) coming from a single source, Petronas.

Rating agencies and international creditors have already forewarned that Malaysia need to diversify its revenue sources and reduce subsidies.

This means that to protect Malaysia's current credit rating, it is inevitable that some form of tax, e.g. GST has to be introduced, while subsidies on petrol, sugar and a host of other essential items must be reduced.

The government has acknowledged as much via its agency Pemandu, though these reforms has been swept under the carpet due to elections. But the implementation is inevitable.

What this mean for the low-income households, as they queue under the hot sun to get their BR1M cheques (so that BN representatives can snap a picture or two for publicity), they will receive a one time off and unsustainable boost to their income, while their costs of living will rise over many fronts on a permanent basis. Net effect to their standard of living? Likely to be minimal.

A host of other welfare initiatives, such as gradually reducing car prices and broadband fees are akin to giving scraps to the masses while some privileged few continue to enjoy a sumptuous buffet spread.

Car prices in Malaysia are artificially expensive because of AP's awarded to BN cronies and super-high excise duties to protect politically-connected car companies, some of which even accorded "national car" status when most of its components are sourced overseas.

For so many years, we Malaysians slaved to pay off our car installments, while these AP holders and "national" concessionaires laugh all the way to the bank, without breaking a sweat.

Finally, only after Pakatan Rakyat unveil their aim to lower car prices, presto, does the BN government scramble to make cars affordable for the masses. Too little, too late.

The scheme to lower broadband fees may be cause to celebrate until you compare the costs with our neighboring countries.

A Unifi package offered by Telekom Malaysia for 20Mbps upload/download speed is at RM250 per month, while a similar package offered by M1 Singapore costs just RM100.

And for RM250, M1 Singapore will give the user up to 200 Mbps, or 10 times the speed given by TM for the same price! And if we compare data plans given by Maxis, Celcom and the likes against what is offered by their counterparts in Singapore, we will soon realise that due to the monopolistic control of our national broadband spectrum by these well-connected companies with the BN government, users in Malaysia has always received the short end of the stick.

All these years, we have been paying up to 100 percent or more for similar data packages, and now the BN party wants to cut it by 20 percent?!

The government also announced that one million "affordable" homes will be built, including 500,000 PR1MA houses that will be priced 20 percent below market rates. You see the key word, below market rates.

With the government reserving massive swathes of prime land for politically-connected companies or state agencies, it is little wonder that land prices are escalating at a rate faster than the increase in average wages.

It could be that by the time these homes are built and released at 20 percent discount to the market rate, the low-income purchaser would be no better-off than he is now.

Meanwhile, million dollar homes are still selling like hot cakes in the city centre and a 100-storey monument are built in an already oversupplied office space by a certain state agency.

Poor households owe nothing to the BN government for these BR1M handouts.

For years, Malaysians has borne the brunt of artificially high prices due to the collision between powerful tycoons and their political masters, while corruption and lop-sided deals has seeped away billions which could have been used to boost our spending power via targeted cuts in income tax or sustaining the subsidies on essential items.

What the BN gives on one hand, it takes away on another. The privileged few, under the protection of BN, have been enjoying the blood and sweat of millions of Malaysians for too long.

Do not be swayed by these crumbs from desperate BN politicians who want to continue to stick their crummy hands into the national cookie jar - it is time to take back what has always been rightfully ours.

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