

Bank unionists storm Segamat in bid to oust Subra

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By Nigel Aw

JOHOR The National Union of Bank Employees (Nube) did not mince its words today in vowing to see caretaker Human Resources Minister Dr S Subramaniam's defeat in Segamat as more than 200 of its members descended on the town.

NONENot to be outdone, Subramaniam's supporters, clad in blue BN T-shirts, mobilised in equal numbers across the street but were simply overwhelmed as Nube members came prepared with drums, kompang and South African horns, the vuvuzela.

The red-clad Nube members created a carnival-like atmosphere along the row of banks on Jalan Kampung Genuang as they danced and sang "Tolak Subra" (Reject Subra) to the tune of various songs and waved large Nube flags.

Subra's supporters watched on as they tried to outdo the Nube group with a handful of honks and placards reading "We love Subra, We love BN".

However, the deafening drums and vuvuzelas drowned out the BN group as passing cars honked to the tune of the Nube songs.

The picketers also danced to the tune of popular South Korean hit 'Gangnam Style' and chanted "Arise workers, long live the workers!"

War of noises

BN's group later received reinforcement in the form of a loudspeaker mounted on a four-wheel-drive vehicle which blasted out the '1Malaysia' and 'IM4U' songs at the red picket.

Passing BN campaign vehicles also honked in support for their group as the BN supporters cheered.

Speaking to journalists later, Nube president Tan Eng Hong denied Subramaniam's accusation that the union was playing politics by picketing so close to the general election.

NONE "It so happens that the general election is only four days away from May 1 and so we are celebrating Workers Day.

"We are apolitical, if we are political we would have held a nationwide picket against BN but no, we are only targeting Subramaniam in Segamat because he has victimised the workers," he said.

Aside from being upset that Subramaniam refuses to dissolve the creation of an internal union in the country's largest bank, Maybank, which Nube says is aimed at diluting its power, Tan said the union has a laundry list of other complaints against Subramaniam.

"There are many other problems like the termination of our members by banks for their union activities and the delay in implementing the raising of the private sector retirement age to 60 which was supposed to be on Jan 1, 2013 but has been delayed by Subra to July 1, 2013 - this delay will affect 500,000 workers," he said.

Tan said Nube has some 150-200 members in Segamat and will continue to picket for the next two days in a bid to create awareness among the local Segamat folk about Subramaniam's track record and urge them to reject him.

NONE

Earlier, PKR's parliamentary candidates for Segamat and Sekijang, Chua Jui Meng and Julailey Jemadi, as well as state candidate for Kemelah, Natra Ismail, paid a brief visit to the picket.

"Chua told us that if Pakatan wins, he will help lobby the new federal government to look into the demands. If politicians want to visit, we cannot stop them but we did not invite anyone.

"Whoever becomes the new human resource minister, it doesn't matter if it is from BN or Pakatan, as long as the minister looks after the welfare of the workers," he said.

The agitated BN supporters had attempted to lunge at Chua's vehicle as he was leaving on the main road, but were held back by police who helped to separate the two crowds.

They had similarly attempted the same at other passing Pakatan vehicles, but the police managed to keep the situation under control.

"We are here to celebrate Workers Day here but I have no idea what the other side is celebrating," Tan said as he pointed to BN's side.

'BN out to defend own candidate'

When approached, Segamat Umno Youth deputy chief Mohd Fauzi Ahmad claimed that Nube had been infiltrated by the opposition to turn it against Subramaniam, BN's candidate for Segamat.

"There is nothing wrong about picketing but doing so here so near to the general election is a provocation.

"We have come out to defend Subramaniam against the untrue accusations hurled at him," he said.

NONEMeanwhile, Johor police spokesperson ACP Abdul Aziz Ahmad said there were no untoward incidents during today's picket and counter-protest.

"The OCPD was at the scene to ensure safety. Nube had a permit and the other party was impromptu so the police were there to ensure safety and security," he said.

The picket went on for a total of two hours before they dispersed, and BN supporters subsequently followed suit.

In an immediate reaction, Subramaniam said Maybank's internal union was formed at the request of 4,500 of its members.

He also described Nube's allegation that he was out to destroy unions as "frivolous, vexatious and baseless" and claimed it is aimed at helping the opposition to erode worker's support for BN.

"Between April 2008 and April 2013, 160 new trade unions representing 8,468 workers were approved," he said.

NONESubramaniam (left) added that BN had in the recent years introduced several pro-workers policies including the setting up of a minimum wage council, raising the retirement age from 55 to 60 and expanding social security for workers.

Others include increasing training for workers, provision for free medical check-up for Socso contributors, creation for special housing scheme and supply of clean water for estate workers, he said.

"The Malaysian workers who are the backbone for national development are matured and intelligent and they cannot be manipulated through incorrect and falsified propaganda by few irresponsible unionists who are using the 13th general

election as a platform to support the opposition," he said.

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