

## **Not all are amused with 'Water Ubah'**

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**By Susan Loone**

Although "Ubah on Water" was a big hit with many staunch DAP supporters, evident by their large numbers at the launch event this morning, many other Penangites aren't too thrilled.

Some saw it as a misrepresentation of culture, while others saw it as a waste of the RM60,000 spent. Some also think that the 7m-high PVC behemoth of an inflatable contradicts the state's plastic bag ban.

Met at the IJM Promenade, where the inflatable was launched, Mohammad Asrol, who hails from Bayan Lepas, said the gimmick was a "cheap publicity stunt" and a waste of money, even though it was sponsored by DAP supporters.

He added that it would be seen as an attempt to ape Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman's success with his floating inflatable duck in Hong Kong and that the hornbill does not even represent Penang.

"The bird lives in the Sarawak highlands. Placing the bird on water shows that we (peninsula people) are ignorant of the state's native culture," he said.

'Hornbills don't float on water'

Another spectator at the launch, SY Chin, wondered if having a giant PVC structure for only six weeks would send the wrong message about the state's environmental policies. The inflatable hornbill will only be exhibited until Aug 31.

"It is not so environmentally friendly since it is made of plastic and Penang's green policies ban plastic bags from being given out to the public," said the 30-year-old public relations practitioner.

She added that from a public relations standpoint, although the gimmick was "impressive" and a "smart political initiatives", it was still a "toy" that provides entertainment value.

"I would question why the bird is being floated on water. If we look deeper, the idea of floating means being directionless and aimless," she said.

G Michael found the inflatable smaller than expected, which did not justify the

RM60,000 price tag. He, too, questioned the reasons behind having a hornbill floating on water.

"Perhaps, it is better perched on Penang Hill, it would then be more meaningful," said the company director, 45.

"DAP sees it as agent of change, of course this is up to interpretation but a Sarawakian would laugh at this, to see the bird float on water because it does not represent their culture."

'Learning from the best'

Criticisms aside, about 1,000 people who attended the two-hour launch event this morning under the rain seem happy to see the giant sized DAP mascot. Many ended up mobbing DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng for autographs and photographs.

Speaking to reporters later, Lim agreed that the gimmick was political in nature and "that is why the state government did not fund it".

He said that he had written to Hofman, urging him to bring the duck to Penang, but did not obtain a response. He added that it was not wrong to borrow Hofman's idea.

"We are not ashamed to copy an idea that is good and successful. What is wrong with learning from the best?" he asked.

"When we learn from the best we are criticised. When others learn the ways of corruption and abuse of power from those who are not good, they are not questioned."

Lim said that the inflatable was not under the care of the state's tourism arm, Penang Global Tourism, which will arrange for the object's "security".

None of the critics approached by Malaysiakini wanted to have their photographs published.

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