

**Major offensives in Batu Sapi draw strong responses**  
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It was a day of debates that didn't happen, as the two opposition parties contesting the Batu Sapi by-election launched major offensives to win over the hearts and minds of their prospective constituents.

Debate or no debate, locals gave overwhelming support to both SAPP and Sabah Pakatan Rakyat, as both held their first large-scale ceramahs at opposite ends of town after nearly a week of door-to-door campaigns and localised gatherings.

NONESAPP were first off the block starting at noon, drawing a mixed crowd of some 1,000 enthusiastic supporters to the Hakka Hall at Mile 6 in anticipation of a face-off between SAPP president and Batu Sapi candidate Yong Teck Lee (left) and Chief Minister Musa Aman.

As anticipated, Musa was a no-show as he had already said he was not interested to debate an issue that Yong himself did not raise when he was chief minister, leaving SAPP with little choice but to call off the debate at 1pm and turn it into a full-blown campaign gathering.

This did little to dim the supercharged atmosphere, as Yong coaxed the entire crowd to their feet, pumping their fists in the air as they cheered "SAPP boleh!" as he ended his speech.

The crowd was so pumped up, they even got up a second time on their own and repeated the battle cry after watching a video of Yong during nomination day, when he said it was the start of freedom for Sabah.

ansari abdullah 291010As if that was not enough excitement at the Hakka Hall, SAPP received an unexpected visitor in the form of PKR's candidate for Batu Sapi, Ansari Abdullah (left).

Prior to Ansari's arrival, PKR's campaign machinery shot out an SMS to the media which said that "brave" Ansari will "enter the lion's den" at 1pm and debate the issue of Sabah autonomy with Yong.

'Don't cause trouble'

On arrival, Ansari was met by a clutch of SAPP leaders who were clearly perplexed by his presence though they did escort him into the hall and gave him and his small group of supporters seats at the back of the crowd.

He was however thronged by journalists covering the event, who were curious as to whether he was there to actually challenge Yong to a debate or to just be part of the crowd.

The commotion sparked some tension among SAPP party workers, with one of them loudly saying jangan kacau (don't cause trouble) a few times as Ansari made his way to his seat.

Ansari was later met by SAPP information chief Chong Pit Fah, who said there was no problem for the latter to attend the debate as a spectator.

When asked if he would go up to debate with Yong, Ansari said he was just there to watch the debate and would only go up if he were invited.

NONEHe left about 15 minutes after arriving, saying that since the debate was called off he would instead go back to Sanbay Hotel where he was to host a debate between Yong and BN's candidate Linda Tsen Thau Lin (left) at 2pm.

Good turnout for Pakatan

Pakatan drew nearly as large a crowd at the Sanbay Hotel ballroom for their event, which likewise had to be changed to a ceramah after both Yong and Tsen rejected Ansari's debate challenge.

The small venue was unable to accommodate the 800 mostly bumiputera supporters, many of whom had to stand outside to listen to the speakers, led by de-facto chief Anwar Ibrahim and DAP advisor Lim Kit Siang.

The crowd at Sanbay matched the enthusiasm of SAPP 's supporters, who listened in rapt attention and responded in unison to every proclamation of freedom and justice for Sabah by the speakers.

Some leaders also took the opportunity to take pot-shots at Yong, with PKR election director and Kuantan MP Fuziah Salleh implying that she didn't buy Yong's reason for rejecting Ansari's challenge to a debate.

Yong had earlier said Ansari had no locus standi to challenge anyone to a debate, though Fuziah said the official reason he gave them was that he had already arranged for a debate with Musa.

"If you don't dare to debate now, how are you going to enter Parliament?," she said.

Ansari, who is no longer wearing a sling on his right arm, also posed a second challenge to both Yong and Tsen to an open debate.

"We will let Yong decide on the debate topic," he said.

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