

Pakatan ship stays afloat amidst squalls
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comment

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Achieving their one-million target was always going to be a stretch for the organiser of yesterday's rally against the latest increase in petrol prices from June 5.

Going by media reports, which placed the crowd at 10,000-30,000 people, there was a shortfall of 97-99 percent.

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 43Nevertheless, such a diverse crowd - spread out all through the 12-hour marathon rally - has not been seen since the run-up to the 12th general election.

Although, PAS supporters dominated the grounds, there were pockets of dan lain-lain sprinkled among the eager listeners.

What this means is that, since awaking from their 40-year political slumber on March 8, Malaysians are showing they still care and want more say in the future of the country.

And a topic on the effects of the massive petrol price hike plus a chance to see the top leaders of Pakatan Rakyat leaders in action were something they were not about to miss.

Not even the number of road blocks put up in the city or the various warnings by the police deterred them.

carburator dung lewd performance at protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 03Nonetheless, credit must be given where credit is due. Other than the hiccup caused by an over-enthusiastic rocker showed off his underwear, the event went on smoothly.

Sensibility prevailed as, two days before the event, the Coalition Against Inflation (Protes) heeded police advice and moved the event to the confines of a stadium.

The police played their part too. Other than the half a dozen FRU trucks stationed inside the MAS Training Academy five minutes away, they kept away. Special Branch officers were placed inside and outside the stadium.

Old couples, young parents and even hand-holding teenagers took a break from the Malaysian Mega Sale to vent their frustrations.

Those patient enough to stay on were able to listen to PAS leaders Dr Hatta Ramli and Kamaruddin Jaafar and DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang. In between they were treated to a reading of Diusman's pop poetry Bukan Orang Gila.

PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim rounded off the event with an energetic delivery marked with promises of reformasi.

Nothing more than promises

It may seem too much to ask, but there was really nothing new in the Pakatan Rakyat message. Since the elections were concluded, they have been holding out the promise of lower fuel prices.

And yet, at this rally against petrol-price hikes, no insight was given on how they intend to achieve this without rendering huge deficits in the national coffers.

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 32 Instead, the main message from Lim and Anwar (right) was hugely dominated by the "unfair and baseless" sodomy allegation against the latter.

It was put about that the notion of "dirty politics" had been invented by Umno and Barisan Nasional. More was said about how unIslamic it would be to swear an oath on the Koran if one has not been charged under Syariah law, than about petrol prices.

In fact, the closest Anwar got to the topic of petrol prices was that he would rather hug the secret to himself.

The other memorable mention was that Anwar would rather debate the issue with Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his deputy Najib Abdul Razak, rather than Information Minister Ahmad Shabeery Cheek on July 15.

Pakatan set to sail on

In the post-election week, former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad had brushed aside Pakatan's claims that it is now the people's choice.

Mahathir chose to blame Abdullah solely for voters' loss of confidence in the prime minister's leadership and admitted a "mistake" in having handed over the reins to him in 2003.

The former premier also suggested that Pakatan's success was due to Abdullah's failure and not due to any strength of the opposition coalition.

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 37 Mahathir may not have been very far off. A survey by Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research too found that 72 percent of respondents were surprised by the election outcome.

Yet, the Pakatan coalition seems to be picking up steam while the Barisan Nasional (BN) has made largely unpopular decisions leading to higher prices.

In the states that it governs, Pakatan has pushed through free water to all households in Selangor and distribution of food staples to lower-income groups.

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 39 What's more perplexing for BN is that some of its initiatives fizzled out quickly. One speaker correctly pointed to the lunacy of a recent suggestion for twice-monthly payment of salary to civil servants.

"It doesn't matter how many times they are paid as long as the pay is the same. Whether it's 30 times a month or once a month, their salaries have not improved. So, what good is this to us?" he asked.

Both sides of the political divide have certainly found it hard going to keep their focus on matters of governance, amidst frequent political squalls.

But, four months into the voyage, it is also clear that the Pakatan yacht shows fewer holes. If anything, it should sink slower than the BN super-liner.

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