

Kereta Buruk, Tapi Tayar Kilat; Metaphor For Corruption In Malaysia
MalaysianMirror.com
30 June 2012
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The future is bright, so Najib would like us to believe. If anyone needs a metaphor for a country under his rule, how about the following? A heap of rusting metal, held together with duct tape, with four new gleaming tyres – the new Malaysian taxi. In Najib's latest move to persuade members of the public to vote Umno, he has dished out tyre vouchers worth RM520 to taxi-drivers.

Najib's charm offensives are superficial and do not make an impact where it matters. Like many things in government, the analogy of the kereta taxi buruk (unroadworthy taxi) with new tyres, is apt.

The driver's skills and knowledge of the roads may be questionable, he could be rude, or refuse to use the meter; but to be fair, many taxi-drivers are frustrated with the taxi permit system, but are powerless to do anything about it. The majority of taxi drivers have difficulty making ends meet because the taxi-permit system strangles their livelihood.

Najib ignores all these issues because he cannot break the vice-like grip of his cronies, who are the main beneficiaries of the taxi-permits.

The offer of the new tyres is a variant of Najib's infamous "I help you, you help me" remark, made in Sibul during canvassing for the Sarawak state elections.

Anyone who has been in a taxi will have experienced some or all of the following: Broken quarter lights stuffed with newspaper. Heavily stained seats. Highly perfumed interiors probably masking an objectionable smell. Boots which do not close properly and are held shut with string. Doors which are jammed.

Where are the regulatory bodies to enforce vehicle roadworthiness, the driver's eligibility to drive and the compulsory use of meters?

With his latest offering, what use is a tyre voucher when another Umno crony may well be benefitting from the sale of the tyres? To add insult to injury, the vouchers will probably only be valid at garages owned by BN cronies.

Najib described the "modern slavery" caused by the monopoly of taxi licences held by private companies. This problem has been widely acknowledged for ages. Umno cronies own the consortiums which then rent out taxis to the drivers.

Taxi drivers resent the ease with which the companies earn income off them without any of the labour involved. It is alleged that drivers have to cough up the daily fee, even when sick or having to take time off for personal reasons.

At one time, it is believed that individuals held their own taxi-permits but Umno changed all that

resulting in the decline in service and standards.

Najib is reluctant to take the taxi-permits away from his Umno cronies because their wrath, will cost him dear for GE-13. His most sensible option is to hold out for a couple of years, by 'promising' to end the monopoly within this time-frame. This buys him enough time to placate both the sharks in the Umno sea, and also the disgruntled taxi drivers.

In the past few months, Najib has preyed on Felda settlers, petty traders, taxi drivers and most recently cartoonists. He enticed them with goodies, gave them cash handouts and made promises, which he hopes they will forget.

Each Felda settler household was offered RM15,000, petty traders received discounts for each renewal of their business licence and cartoonists were offered awards and prize money of RM10,000 each. Najib is aware of the power of the pen and the large swathes of the population who are influenced by these cartoonists; so he tried to buy their silence.

Households earning less than RM2,000 per month, will receive their second round of RM500 in the Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M) scheme.

Rather than introducing more superficial measures, the PM would be well advised to remove the Umno cronies who control the supply of commodities.

It is these cronies who through their companies, artificially inflate the price of goods to squeeze more money from the rakyat.

Najib knows he cannot do that because they would withdraw their support for him in GE-13.

There is a need to restore the pride in the work and professionalism of taxi-drivers. We do not need Najib performing another sticking plaster job. Why should the process of issuing taxi-drivers with their own taxi-permits take two years? Why belittle the taxi-drivers with tyre vouchers?

As GE-13 approaches, which other groups of workers will Najib entice with his insincere rhetoric and his bag of goodies? People want permanent solutions to their problems, not short term measures.

The threat of the opposition making inroads into people's minds, by making them question outdated and established practices and by exposing the many acts of corruption, must have rattled Najib, thus forcing him to make this gesture of reconciliation with the taxi-drivers. He must have felt like many of us do, when we are at the mercy of taxi-drivers.

The analogy of the 'kereta buruk tapi tayar kilat' is most apt. Najib's superficial measures, like his tyres, will soon become bald and prove to be just as dangerous as a vehicle that is held together with duct tape.