

Pakatan banks on NFC, corruption index to counter Umno attacks
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By Yow Hong Chieh

SHAH ALAM, Dec 5 — Under attack from Umno at its annual congress, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) last night fell back on its administrative track record in four states to hammer home its claim that the ruling party has failed to improve the lot of Malaysians.

Making full use of the alleged financial irregularities in a national cattle farming scheme and this year's dip in Malaysia's corruption score, PR leaders hit back at Umno in a concerted show of force after enduring five days of attacks during last week's Umno general assembly.

A section of the crowd listening to Anwar speak in Shah Alam on December 4, 2011. — Picture by Yow Hong Chieh

Pulling no punches, a fiery Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim pointed out that Umno has doubly wronged the people by first misusing public funds meant for the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) and then defending Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jalil.

The Wanita Umno chief, who is also the women, family and community minister, has been dogged by controversy over her family's role in the NFC ever since the Auditor-General labelled the project in November as a "mess" for failing to meet production targets.

PKR has alleged that Shahrizat's husband, Datuk Mohamed Salleh Ismail, who runs the NFC, used a multi-million ringgit federal loan to pursue unrelated ventures — including a RM13.8 million condominium buy — as well as to fund personal expenses.

"Only those with no morals can hurl abuse (at Pakatan), can steal RM250 million... and then defend themselves.

"Their first wrong was to misuse funds, and their second was to defend their actions," Anwar told over 2,000 supporters who had gathered in the car park next to Malawati Stadium here despite the drizzle.

The PKR de facto leader was joined by other top opposition leaders, including Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat, Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, Lim Kit Siang, Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim and Azmin Ali.

Also present was national laureate Datuk A. Samad Said, who emerged as a fierce critic of the Najib administration earlier this year during the Bersih 2.0 rally for electoral reform.

PAS president Abdul Hadi similarly made reference to the NFC scandal in refuting Umno's charge that the Islamist party was the DAP's stooge and the MCA's claim that the DAP was under the thumb of PAS.

"PAS diperkudakan oleh DAP. DAP diperkudakan oleh PAS... Umno diperlembukan (PAS is being ridden like a horse by DAP. DAP is being ridden by PAS... Umno is made to look the cow)," he said to raucous laughter from the partisan crowd.

"Lebih baik diperkuda daripada diperlembukan kerana kuda untuk perjuangan, lembu untuk disembelih (It's better to be ridden like a horse than to be made to look the cow as horses are for fighting, cows are for slaughter)."

PAS spiritual leader Nik Aziz had earlier turned Barisan Nasional's (BN) accusations on its head, claiming instead that Umno had abandoned true Islamic principles on the MCA's account.

"Umno is forced to reject Islam because it wants to please MCA," he said.

Taking a different tack, Lim focused on Malaysia's worsening score in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), noting that the country had fallen 13 places to 60th place since Datuk Seri Najib Razak took over as prime minister in 2009.

"Can Umno change? Can Umno change? We need to a change Umno. And to make change, we need to ensure that Datuk Seri Najib becomes the opposition leader after the 13th general election..."

"We can start a new... chapter (in the nation's history) where there will be justice, freedom and prosperity for all Malaysians."

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