

BN troubled as Pakatan rally draws more support

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By Clara Chooi

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KUCHING, April 11 — Barisan Nasional (BN) was left red-faced last night when two separate rallies across the city featuring Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his arch-nemesis Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim drew vastly different crowd numbers.

The usually conservative Sarawak folk arrived in droves at Anwar's rally in the Batu Kawah constituency just 30 minutes outside of the city, all clambering to listen to the opposition leader and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) bigwigs like DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng and PAS spiritual leader Datuk Seri Nik Aziz Nik Mat.

According to observers at least 8,000 were in attendance, causing a major two-hour traffic congestion on the roads leading to the ceramah venue.

Held at the same time in the same city, Najib's 1 Malaysia meet-the-leaders session paled in comparison.

Even with the bussing of people from various neighbouring constituencies into Kuching South City Hall's indoor stadium, only a thousand were seen in it.

Each participant were given a 1 Malaysia t-shirt to wear to signal unity and flags to wave at BN government leaders as they made their way into the stadium.

Accompanying the BN chairman were the five Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) candidates, and political bigwigs like Gerakan president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein.

After the prime minister followed the red carpet trail leading into the hall to the sounds of hoots and whistles from the white-shirt supporters, hundreds were seen streaming out, choosing to opt out of listening to his speech.

Instead, they were seen loitering around the stadium complex, chatting and feasting on the hamburgers and mineral water that were handed out.

Even as Najib's function kicked off, large numbers were seen lounging in the buses and vans that had ferried them into the venue.

When the prime minister began his speech, large groups of people, garbed in the 1 Malaysia t-shirts, decided to stream out of the hall.

Others appeared to look bored but clapped dutifully at Najib's punchlines or when those around them did so. The bleachers steadily emptied out as the night wore on.

While the BN chairman tried to temper the people's growing anger against Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud by pleading with them to believe the chief minister's succession promise, the

thousands that gathered at Batu Kawah cheered as PR's leaders told them to believe otherwise.

According to reporters at the venue, Anwar received steady attention from the crowd throughout his speech.

In his element when addressing such large audiences, the opposition leader told Sarawakians to believe in PR and its leaders, adding that "Pek Moh", the Hokkien term used to describe Taib, and his men in government, needed to learn from Lim, Nik Aziz and other opposition leaders.

"They have never stolen state land from the people," he pointed out.

He drew from PR's experiences in the Selangor and Penang state governments, pointing out that "in Selangor you get free water but in Sarawak only the rainwater is free".

Sarawak will go to polls this April 16 in an election that is fast becoming BN's to lose.

While PR's leaders have long admitted that BN would successfully defend its hold over the hornbill state, many have also expressed confidence that the pact's numbers win the state assembly would be significantly reduced.

BN presently has 63 seats in the 71-seat assembly while DAP has six and PKR and Parti Cinta Malaysia have one each.

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