

Drought of new ideas threatens Pakatan's Putrajaya bid
The Malaysian Insider
January 15 , 2012
By Yow Hong Chieh

ANALYSIS, Jan 15 — More than a year on after unveiling its Buku Jingga book of reforms, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) appears to have moved little from where it was at its previous convention in Penang.

Eschewing bold moves for refried ideas laid out in its Buku Jingga, PR looked less a forward-looking pact at its third convention in Alor Star yesterday than one content to offer old wine in new bottles.

This was most evident in PR's decision to repackage four policy thrusts from the 13-month-old master plan as "Tawaran Jingga", accompanied by well-rehearsed speeches touting the past successes of opposition-led states.

While PR may have been buoyed by the surprise acquittal of its leader, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, little of this renewed vigour and optimism went into resolving key issues still plaguing the sometimes fractious alliance.

Elephants in the room

Still hanging over the opposition like the Sword of Damocles is the question of a shadow Cabinet, which Anwar promised to set up in 2009 while stumping at the Bukit Gantang by-election.

PR has backpedalled from the pledge ever since, citing a lack of resources as the reason why it cannot form a parallel Cabinet.

Also going unanswered was the hudud question, which has on many occasions strained otherwise cordial ties between Islamist PAS and the secular, majority Chinese DAP.

This despite the very clear and present danger the prickly chestnut still poses to PR, having already broken the back of a previous short-lived opposition coalition, Barisan Alternatif, in 2001.

The lone voice of reason in this regard was DAP chairman Karpal Singh, who said last night: "We must resolve the hudud issue as soon as possible. If we don't, we will face problems helming the nation."

The other side

All this as Barisan Nasional (BN) labours hard to chip away at PR's share of middle Malaysia with a raft of reforms calculated to enamour it to the urban demographic and the rapidly swelling ranks of young, new voters.

The Najib administration has also moved quickly to shore up its rural and urban poor vote base by liberally dishing out millions in cash to take the sting out of rapidly rising inflation.

So while the opposition may have made significant inroads into Negeri Sembilan and, to a lesser extent, east Malaysia, it will likely lose seats to BN in Kelantan where Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat has been menteri besar for more than 20 years or even the state of Kedah where both rival pacts are seen as weak.

Perak remains a toss-up, say analysts, as BN has been working hard to consolidate its grip on the state it took over courtesy of three defections in 2009, almost a year after losing it in Election 2008.

Where to from here

PR should treat its achievements as self-evident — as they should be — and move quickly to resolve key issues rather than waste its second chance at political life regurgitating tired tales.

Its disparate component parties must sit down together and hash out once and for all present problems rather than look to the past for succour, so it may step into the future with clear vision.

If they cannot do this for their own sakes then at least do it for voters who may be curious about the pact's third act: "But what happens after?"

But with elections looming, only time will tell if this will be too little, too late for PR, which spent what may well be its last convention before snap polls are called gazing in the wrong direction.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/drought-of-new-ideas-threatens-pakatans-putrajaya-bid/>