

**BN bid to blunt Pakatan attacks brings risk of being seen as weak**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
**August 23, 2012**  
**By Ida Lim**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 23 — By agreeing to successive demands — from investigating Sabah’s illegal immigrants problem to repealing security laws and considering a review of oil royalties and even allowing public rallies — the Barisan Nasional (BN) government is hoping to blunt Pakatan Rakyat’s (PR) momentum on issues the opposition has championed, but political analysts say it also risks being seen as being a weak government ahead of elections expected soon.

BN politicians have argued that the government’s position is not one of capitulation but is a sign that the ruling coalition is now listening to the public and making the right moves towards political reforms.

But political analysts and watchers interviewed by The Malaysian Insider say the BN government runs the danger of projecting an image of having no grand ideas of its own.

Ahead of the 13th general election, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has carried out various reforms in what is seen as a bid to hijack PR’s aggressive campaign to take power in Putrajaya.

Najib’s administration has abolished the Internal Security Act (ISA) and plans to repeal the controversial Sedition Act.

It has also enacted a new law that allows public rallies although any benefit from that was severely eroded after the authorities forcibly broke up the latest Bersih protest on April 28.

PR and Sabah opposition politicians were also using the problem of illegal immigrants in Sabah to score points among disgruntled voters in the state, but Najib stepped in recently to set up a royal commission of inquiry after the recent defections of senior Sabah BN lawmakers.

Wan Saiful Wan Jan, chief executive of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), told The Malaysian Insider that “it’s unfortunate that we have a government that is copying what the opposition proposes.”

“They should be the ones leading. Copying is not really leadership,” he said, adding that “they need to start coming up with policies of their own.”

However, he notes that “it shows that it’s good for a country to have a strong opposition” as there would be “real competition” between politicians on “what is good policy for the public.”

Asked about the effect of BN’s measures on voters, he said “it’s risky for the government to continue this strategy of copying PR.”

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"People may start questioning who is the real leader," he said, warning that it will "harm" BN in the long term as it may "lose leadership status and become a follower."

Prof Dr Jayum A. Jawan, a professor of politics and government with Universiti Putra Malaysia, agreed with Wan Saiful, saying that "they (BN) are doing the right thing but they are stealing somebody's idea."

He points to the federal government's "weak think-tank" for its failure to come up with its own "grand ideas".

He said BN appears to be "responding because of pressure from PR", saying it needs to have a "comprehensive review" instead of "responding to one or two issues."

"Is BN going to respond every time PR comes up with an issue?" he asked, saying that the opposition will never give up asking.

He said the BN's reforms will enable the opposition pact to claim credit by saying that its campaign worked.

Professor Datuk Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, a political analyst with UKM, disagreed with the view that by fulfilling the public's demands the Najib administration would be seen as weak.

But he told The Malaysian Insider that it is an "illusion" that BN can change voters' minds with such reforms, saying it is only a "feel-good" factor.

Shamsul said the people would not be easily satisfied, adding that they are more interested in changing the federal government.

He said the real impact on elections will be from "issues that directly affect voters' daily lives", especially the economy and "people's fears about crime".

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