

Manifesto copycat debate refuses to die down at GE13 forum
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 11 — Politicians from both sides of the divide refused to back down at a forum last night as each accused the other of copying its manifesto in the run-up to Election 2013.

The sharp exchange in the forum, organised by Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) here, came amid accusations by Barisan Nasional (BN) deputy chairman Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on Tuesday that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) incorporated existing government policies into its election pledges.

“Yes, we can look into even the title of the manifesto: ‘Janji Ditepati Harapan Rakyat’. It is similar to ‘Pakatan Harapan Rakyat,’” said PAS’s Datuk Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa, after a member of audience asked whether BN had copied PR’s manifesto.

The BN manifesto, launched last Saturday, is titled “Menepati Janji, Membawa Harapan” (Fulfilling promises, carrying hope). PR’s manifesto, launched in February, is titled “Pakatan Harapan Rakyat” (Pakatan the hope of the people). Both manifestos promise a mix of cash handouts and policy tweaks for almost every segment of society.

“We were the first to pioneer this manifesto, and then when someone came in later, we say they’re the copycats,” said Mujahid, while explaining that PR’s manifesto had been in the works since the pact agreed on its Common Policy Framework back in December 2009.

“There is no point to debate who started it because it was clear that Pakatan started it many years ago,” said the DAP’s national political education director Liew Chin Tong, echoing Mujahid’s view.

MCA vice-president Senator Gan Ping Sieu then hit back at Liew by insisting that the ideas presented by PR’s manifesto are common ideas which do not belong to anyone.

“How can you steal the idea as if ideas can be stolen? ... You’re claiming monopoly and the credit,” Gan said.

His partner in the forum, Umno supreme council member Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, however tried to distance himself from the copycat debate.

He admitted politicians were always trying to target each other instead of issues, and joked that in the 14th general election parties will race to release their manifestos first.

“We’re supposed to bring the political discourse to another level ... I think the rakyat should take this as a blessing,” said the caretaker deputy minister of higher education of both coalitions’ allegedly similar manifestos.

“This shows that both sides are becoming more centrist in their approach in trying to win the general election.”

On Monday, PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli had slammed BN’s manifesto as a bootleg version of PR’s pledges. He had also claimed that only 14 per cent of its rival’s promises was original while 15 per cent was stolen from the federal opposition bloc.

BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak then refuted claims from the opposition, accusing PR of only fulfilling 15 per cent of the manifesto that it had promised during Election 2008.

But while PR and BN are hawking their respective election manifestos as the gold standard, political pundits say both are scant on how to implement their solutions to the country's problems and lack a larger policy framework that unites their proposals.

Analysts The Malaysian Insider spoke to agreed that both coalitions are taking a populist, vote-buying approach in their manifestos, addressing issues they see as being important enough to swing the votes of the "kingmakers" in what has been tipped to be the closest election fight in the country's history.

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