

Pakatan manifesto leaves many 'perplexed'

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The Pakatan Rakyat manifesto has addressed heavy and obvious' issues affecting the people. However, the manifesto has left many unhappy by leaving out glaring points.

IN the charged political atmosphere of today with the Pakatan Rakyat and Barisan Nasional finally ready to face the people, anything that either of the political coalitions put out come under heavy scrutiny.

If in the past, manifestos were hardly given serious attention by the electorate, but this time it is different.

The Pakatan Rakyat manifesto, as expected, has come under a barrage of criticism from Barisan Nasional leaders.

But what is surprising is that even NGO activists, environmental groups and Indian organisations have something negative to say about the manifesto.

They are unhappy that their special interest has been left out of the document and among the bigger group are minority Indians who are unhappy the manifesto does not specifically mention them.

Predictably, Barisan leaders slammed the manifesto as another litany of promises that the opposition could not fulfil.

But when the Barisan unveils its manifesto, it can expect the same degree of scrutiny.

The Barisan questioned how the Pakatan can promise to reduce fuel prices and provide free education, among other measures, while at the same time reduce car prices and abolish road tolls.

They want to know from where Pakatan would get the money for its populist policies.

Pakatan defended its manifesto, termed *The People's Pact*, *The People's Hope*, saying it is an inclusive document that is need-based and not race-based.

It even phases out NEP-like affirmative action policies if the coalition captures Putrajaya.

"It's need-based and not race-based," PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli explained at a briefing on Wednesday.

As a political document, the manifesto addresses rising prices, commodities, lodging and good governance that all communities face.

It offers to cut car prices, offer free education, lower fuel prices and ensure that every Malaysian family earned at least RM4,000.

It will pay for the higher national costs of its populist policies by prudent management, thrift and ending leakages.

Unlike the more comprehensive *Buku Jingga* which outlines the three parties' common policy framework, the manifesto falls short of satisfying special interest groups like the disabled and environment activists, but also fails to mention minorities like the Indian community.

The manifesto is an important document and a lot of thinking and planning should ideally go into preparing one but the current document falls short of expectations.

It is meeting a barrage of criticism for its failure to mention the Indian minority who is already suspicious of the intentions of Pakatan leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Now a manifesto that does not mention them and their special need is only expected to fuel more suspicions.

While Anwar has sought to quickly minimise the damage, saying that the manifesto transcends racial groups, the failure to specifically mention the Indian minority is set to rankle them.

From a fixed deposit previously, nearly 82% of Indians backed Pakatan in the 2008 general election and several factors fuelled this changed mindset.

Since then, they have been consistently wooed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Barisan with "care and bearing gifts".

A significant portion of them have shifted their support back.

Indians accept that issues like "rising prices, commodities, lodging, good governance" are important but they also face special and urgent issues like high crime, low skills and poverty that require government intervention.

Responding to this, Hindraf, quickly expressed "extreme disappointment" at Pakatan Rakyat for its neglect of the interests of the Indian community.

Likewise, other special interest groups like the disabled, the Ban Cyanide Action Committee Raub and even oil producing states Kelantan and Terengganu that have been promised 20% oil royalty, have been left out of the important document.

But while they are unhappy that their special interest has been left out, it is the failure to mention Indians as a group that is glaring, said a "perplexed" DAP MP.

On a larger Malaysian scale, the Pakatan Rakyat manifesto also has some unexpected omissions which are inconsistent with its earlier stated policies, lending credence to some analysts who said the manifesto was hurriedly drawn-up.

Among the omissions are its silence on a Goods and Service tax, local government election, freedom of information law and for all politicians to declare their assets, a long standing Pakatan policy.

But on other issues that are equally important, Pakatan is well ahead, announcing its pledge to shut down the Lynas plant in Gebeng, review the oil refinery project in Pengerang, Johor, halt construction of dams in Sarawak and reform logging laws.

Some of the measures in the manifesto are populist in nature like its pledge to abolish the AES traffic summons system, ending the proposed healthcare tax, lowering fuel, electricity and water charges and abolishing road tolls.

These measures are already being implemented by the Barisan government which says it cannot emulate its rival's populism but has to be a responsible government.

Nevertheless, Pakatan populism is benefiting the people, by forcing the Barisan into changing long-standing policies like reducing car prices, turning study loans into scholarships and building affordable homes.

Since 2009, the Barisan has planned and announced one measure after another, all designed to help the people cope with rising living costs, cut red tape and create jobs via direct BR1M payments to numerous One Malaysia projects.

These measures will be detailed in the manifesto that the Barisan would put out in answer to the Pakatan manifesto.

It is left to the voters to decide on which coalition they want a tried, tested and united Barisan Nasional or a new, untested and often squabbling Pakatan Rakyat.

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