

BN needs to go beyond form, fluff to real work
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MAY 11 — A word of caution to the newly-minted Barisan Nasional (BN) government: Malaysians will not be duped by cosmetic change and toddler steps.

Another piece of advice: double-speak will cost the government dearly. Either you discipline and rein in the likes of Utusan Malaysia and distance yourself from Perkasa or expect more urban Malaysians to vote against the coalition in GE14.

In an interview with the Singapore Straits Times, Khairy Jamaluddin, the newly-appointed government spokesman for international media said that the Najib government will be rolling out a 100-day programme to accelerate tackling crime, corruption, cost of living and other concerns of Malaysians.

This move is a good first step: acknowledging that the government despite its alphabet soup of initiatives under Datuk Seri Idris Jala's Pemandu has not satisfied the expectations of urban Malaysia.

In all likelihood, Datuk Seri Najib Razak will borrow heavily from Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, circa 2004, and promise good governance, open tenders, tackling corruption in a big way, slashing crime, etc. Nine years ago, Abdullah caught the imagination of Malaysians with his vow to listen to all, to be a leader of all Malaysians and make the government less autocratic.

After 22 years of excesses of the Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad era, Abdullah's promise of change won over Malaysians and he received the best mandate ever. In 2008, he earned an unattractive place in the history books as the first prime minister to oversee BN's loss of its two-thirds majority in Parliament, the loss of five states.

Five years of inaction and broken promises can turn love to disdain. Abdullah never went through with his promise to clean up Malaysia, let alone Umno. All the headline-grabbing corruption cases ended in a whimper, and he substituted Umno agenda's for the Malaysian agenda which he sold to the electorate in 2004.

Abdullah's failed experiment at bringing change has made Malaysians a cynical lot and that cynicism has been fed further by the symbolic gestures of Najib and the penchant to believe that all Malaysian concerns can be satisfied by money.

The poorer than expected performance of BN on May 5 has perhaps persuaded the PM that substance rather than form is needed. But do not raise expectations if the BN government has no intention of meeting those expectations.

For example, is the MACC going to go after Sarawak's Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud or is he going to get special treatment because he threw a tantrum against the graft busters, and has delivered for BN big time in Sarawak?

Will the 100-day programme to tackle corruption whitewash the fact that many government leaders are living beyond their means or that corruption in the public sector is endemic?

Will the corruption sweep include getting to the bottom of the huge cost escalation in the new low-cost carrier terminal at KLIA?

Malaysians know a great deal about corruption and can smell the stench of a bad deal a mile away. During the election campaign, many were given "information/evidence" of corrupt practices of children of rich politicians and if these princelings are allowed to continue ala business as usual, the government's 100-day programme will meet failure.

Failure will also be inevitable if Khairy and the BN government carry on with this double-speak of "Utusan does not reflect the position of the Umno leadership". Didn't Utusan Malaysia take the cue from the disappointed Umno leaders who accused the Chinese leaders of being ungrateful and gullible?

Didn't Najib refrain from admonishing Utusan Malaysia over its provocative headline "Apa lagi Cina mahu?"

BN or Umno cannot have it both ways: to be the darling of the right wing and to reach out to urban Malaysians, especially non-Malays.

Voters rejected Datuk Zulkifli Noordin, Datuk Ibrahim Ali and Datuk Puad Zarkashi, the most right-wing voices in Umno and Perkasa, because these men stand for ideals which are incongruent with peace-loving and inclusive middle Malaysia.

So until and unless Umno and BN recalibrate the editorial approach of Utusan Malaysia and, for that matter, the mainstream media which have merrily gone on bashing the Chinese, the disconnect between the government and urban Malaysia will only get worse.

To conclude, it is gratifying that the Najib government is going to roll out a 100-day programme but make sure it is substance rather than form. Malaysians voters have little patience with cosmetic dressing and Powerpoint presentations.

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