

## **PH's First 100 Days Generate Optimistic Outlook For Nation**

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**By Nur-ul Afida Kamaludin**

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- In two days, the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government, led by Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, will complete its first 100 days in office.

One hundred days may be too short a period to institute sweeping changes and bring about meaningful reforms but the inroads PH has made in fulfilling some of the 10 main pledges outlined in its 14th General Election (GE14) manifesto have generated enough public confidence in its ability to set in place a New Malaysia.

The 10 main pledges by PH, which comprises PKR, DAP, Bersatu and Amanah, are as follows:

- Abolish the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and reduce the cost of living through the implementation of various initiatives.
- Reintroduce targeted petrol subsidies by stabilising fuel prices.
- Abolish unnecessary debts imposed on Felda settlers.
- Introduce Employees Provident Fund (EPF) contributions for housewives.
- Equalise the minimum wage nationally and start the process to increase the minimum wage.

- Postpone the repayment of PTPTN (National Higher Education Fund) loans for all graduates whose salaries are below RM4,000 a month and abolish the blacklisting policy for defaulters.
- Investigate scandals involving 1MDB, Felda, Mara and Lembaga Tabung Haji, as well as restructure the governance of these organisations.
- Set up a Special Cabinet Committee to properly enforce the Malaysia Agreement 1963.
- Introduce a healthcare scheme called 'Skim Peduli Sihat' to improve public access to higher quality healthcare services.
- Review all megaprojects awarded to foreign countries.

Among the pledges that flew under the PH's radar almost immediately were those related to the abolition of GST, stabilisation of fuel prices, EPF contributions for housewives, postponement of PTPTN loans and investigations into 1MDB.

Dr Mahathir told the Dewan Rakyat last month that the government was committed to realising the various promises stated in its election manifesto.

However, it is currently focused on not only fulfilling its pledges but also improving the government administrative machinery.

"During this 100-day period, there is a lot of work for the government to do... our priority is to take action to clean up the damage caused by the previous administration's corrupt practices and abuse of power," said Dr Mahathir.

FULFIL PLEDGES

Among the significant changes made by the PH government thus far are the abolition of the GST and stabilisation of fuel prices, with the decisions pertaining to these matters made by the newly formed government at its first Cabinet meeting on May 23.

Even before the bill to abolish the GST was passed by the Dewan Rakyat on Aug 8, the six per cent GST was zero-rated from June 1 onwards, while the people were granted a three-month tax holiday pending the implementation of the Sales and Services Tax (SST) in September.

The tax-free period has come as a relief to the people as it gave them higher disposable income. They were also relieved when petrol prices were maintained at RM2.20 a litre for RON95, RM2.65 (RON97) and RM2.18 (diesel).

After the previous government abolished fuel subsidies in 2014, the managed float system came into play whereby petrol prices were determined on a weekly basis.

Meanwhile, the move by the government to remove the names of PTPTN loan defaulters from a travel blacklist has put a smile on the faces of 433,000 borrowers.

The Education Ministry has also allowed PTPTN borrowers earning less than RM4,000 to defer repaying their study loans on the condition that they update their personal information by July 25.

There is good news for women too as the structure for the new voluntary EPF contribution scheme for housewives or SURI Incentive Programme (SURI) has already been firmed up, with the government having allocated RM20 million to the implementation of the first phase of the programme.

A total of 359,065 women registered in the e-Kasih database will receive the incentive

through SURI, which will be implemented over three phases and is targeted at housewives, heads of households, single mothers and widows.

Under the first phase, which started on Aug 15, those who are eligible can open EPF accounts with a minimum RM5 contribution, with the government making a monthly contribution of RM40 into their accounts.

The second phase, expected to begin next year, will see the government's contribution increasing to RM50 with the additional RM10 going to the Social Security Organisation (Socso).

Under the third phase of SURI, expected to kick off in early 2020, two per cent of the husband's EPF contribution will be channelled to his wife's account.

Naturally, as expected, the investigations into 1Malaysia Development Berhad came swift and fast and riveted the attention of the nation. On July 4, former Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was charged with three counts of criminal breach of trust and one count of abuse of power in relation to the RM42 million in his personal bank account, the money believed to have come from former 1MDB subsidiary SRC International Sdn Bhd.

On Aug 8, Najib was slapped with three new charges of receiving a total of RM42 million, allegedly obtained from illegal activities, into two bank accounts belonging to him at AmIslamic Bank Berhad at the AmBank Group building, here between December 2014 and Feb 10, 2015.

Najib, 65, pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Commenting on the current landscape, senior lecturer at Universiti Putra Malaysia's Department of Communication Dr Syed Agil Alsagoff said the GE14-triggered 'Malaysian tsunami' showed that the people wanted huge and drastic changes to be made to the nation's political, social and economic systems.

PH was viewed as a coalition that could restore the people's confidence in the government's ability to administer the nation efficiently and in an integrated and transparent manner, he said.

"The freedom given to the media and the people to express their opinions and openly criticise the government through social media shows that the government of the 'New Malaysia' always takes into account the voice of the people and their wishes," he said.

Syed Agil said since taking over the reins of the government on May 10, PH's approach and emphasis have been on improving the quality of life of the people.

"The government's focus on critical sectors like the economy, investment and education is, indeed, having an effect on the socio-economic status of the people, besides strengthening the (various) fields of the economy to ensure political and economic stability and the well-being of the people," he said.

He also pointed out that it was not all that easy for the government to make sweeping changes within its first 100 days in office as many things have to be refined before it can fulfil all its election promises.

He said pledges that could not be delivered due to technical factors should be translated into new policies that were more pragmatic and acceptable to the people.

"As for issues related to our Constitution, the government has to handle them in a fair and equitable manner, and not bow to the demands of minority groups or non-governmental organisations without considering the consequences on the well-being of the people and

nation's prosperity.

"I believe that if the government takes a cautious approach when handling sensitive issues, it will have a positive effect on the people who will then give their support and participate in the formation of the New Malaysia.

"What is important now is for the government to maintain the momentum of racial integration in order to produce a more dynamic and tolerant society," added Syed Agil.

## DIRECTIONS

Clearly, the 100-day period was not merely a time frame for PH to fulfil its election pledges; more than that, it was an opportunity for the government to chart the future directions of the nation in the face of various challenges.

There is also the need to review the policies implemented by the previous government in order to ensure the well-being of the people and the nation, even though this was a time-consuming task.

However, what is important is that the PH government line-up has shown its determination to fulfil the promises outlined in its election manifesto or 'Buku Harapan'.

A few of its pledges have already been fulfilled and hopefully, the others will be realised soon too.

Ultimately, however, PH's competence in governing the nation will be gauged based on its sincerity in championing the interests of the people during this 100-day period.

Translated by Rema Nambiar

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