

Pakatan, too, tight-lipped on funding sources
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By Aidila Razak

The BN is not the only coalition to engage in covert political funding - Pakatan Rakyat too is reluctant to reveal its sources of funds, says notable political scientist Terence Gomez.

Pakatan leaders "fudged the issue" or remained tight-lipped when pressed about covert funding, Gomez said at a Bar Council forum on political funding at Sunway University last night.

10th malaysia plan forum 180610 terence gomez"(I ask) 'Do you have covert funding?' Silence. (I ask) 'Do you have funding from businesses that we know nothing about?' Again, they fudge the issue," he said.

However, Gomez (left) said the reason for not disclosing the sources of funding appeared to differ from the BN or even Umno, whose former president Dr Mahathir Mohamad admitted, at one point, that party assets worth RM1.4 billion in cash, property and shares were held in trust.

According to the Universiti Malaya lecturer, Pakatan's reason for not disclosing its sources of funding was fear that the funders would be harassed.

"They say if they disclose the sources of their funding, the BN will go after (the funders)," Gomez told an audience of about 200 people, mostly university students.

This was confirmed by fellow panellist, DAP's Rasah MP Anthony Loke, who said he has come across individuals refusing to accept receipts, fearing they could be identified as having donated to an opposition party.

NONE"They say, 'I'm afraid if you name me in your receipt book, the authorities will find out and people will come after me'," Loke said.

As such, he said, legislation should be made to compel parties to reveal their sources of funding, and for civil society to lead this demand for regulation as political parties could not be relied to do so.

Gomez, whose area of research is political funding, said voters have the right to know where the money comes from, since the funders could have a significant influence on the policies pursued by politicians.

Discuss policy, not look for money

Evidence of this is the global financial crisis, triggered by liberalisation of the financial sector in the US, following strong industry lobbying and political funding.

The academician said about 70 percent of the democratic countries in the world have introduced state funding for political parties to address this issue of lobbying by funders.

"They don't want parties to be too aligned with certain groups and want politicians sitting down discussing policies instead of spending all their time running helter-skelter looking for money," he said.

On a related matter, Loke said that in principle he supported the proposal that the states held by Pakatan Rakyat provide equal allocations to opposition and government backbenchers.

This, however, may not be practical in reality.

"Selangor offered an exchange, where they would give allocations to BN assemblypersons if the federal government gives the RM1 million allocation to opposition MPs as well.

"But the BN didn't entertain this, because BN assemblypersons don't need our allocation, since they have direct access to funds from the federal government. They never ask (for their allocation)," Loke added.

Thumbs up for automatic voter registration

On a different note, former Election Commission chairperson Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman said he backed the proposal for automatic registration of voters, as this would make life easier for the EC.

abdul rashid abdul rahmanHe said this would also to "stengthen democracy", so that more people could vote.

"Malaysians are very lazy. Registration is simple, but yet they don't bother. We should have 16 million people on the roll, but we have just about 12 million now," Rashid (left) said.

However, the federal consitution clause that requires citizens to update their residential addresses with the National Registration Department if they stay in a place for more than three months must first be enforced.

"Otherwise, we will have people registered to vote in places they don't live in, and this will be problematic," he said.

The turnout would also be a concern, added Rashid, who expected this to drop to as low as under 50 percent if automatic registration is implemented.