

## **Umno, PKR clash head-on over graft**

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**by Nigel Aw**

The issue of corruption grabbed centre stage at an election forum yesterday, with Umno supreme council member Saifuddin Abdullah defending the government's anti-graft efforts.

"Even within Umno there are attempts to combat corruption," the deputy minister told a crowd of some 2,000 in the opposition heartland of Kota Baru, made up mostly of PAS supporters.

"In the context of Umno, (Kinabatangan MP ) Bung Moktar Radin and (Cheras Umno division chief ) Syed Ali Alhabshee have openly called for people who did - whatever that is, it's been mentioned just now - (be held responsible ) ," he said triggering a roar of laughter from the crowd.

Saifuddin was referring to snide remarks from the floor on the National Feedlot Corporation scandal in which Women, Family and Community Development Minister Shahrizat Abdul Jalil is embroiled.

Fuelling the crowd's mood, UM lecturer Abu Hassan Hasbullah estimated that had the RM250 million involved in the controversy been appropriately spent, Malaysia would have "more than half a million cows within three years", earning the enviable record of being largest beef supplier in Asia.

Earlier, PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution Ismail pointed out that the country's Corruption Perception Index (CPI ) had plummeted to 60th under Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

Back pedalling to the rescue

However, UKM lecturer Samsul Adabi Mamat (right ) earned the wrath of the audience when he dismissed Transparency International's figures as "plucked out" of the Internet.

"The index in the Internet, perhaps it is meant for foreign agents to see the fall of our country," Samsul said to loud boos from the crowd that practically drowned out his voice.

He said the figures were meant to incite the people to criticise the nation's leadership, to the detriment of the country.

Calming the outraged crowd, Saifuddin Abdullah said he acknowledged the statistics as it came from a credible institution and that the government administration was improving, with its Government Transformation Programme (GTP) .

Saifuddin touted the GTP as being formulated through brainstorming laboratories that brought together more than 26,000 people.

"This is about democracy... if we involve that many people, it is an innovative democracy and part of transforming to a new and healthy political culture.

"How many people were involved in drafting the Buku Jingga?"

To this, PKR secretary-general and MP for Machang Saifuddin Nasution countered that Pakatan Rakyat had not spent millions in ringgit for consultancy and had formulated it through public feedback.

'Bellwether states key to Putrajaya'

"If there is no manipulation by the Election Commission (EC) in the next general election, I am confident we will win," Saifuddin said.

Equally confident, the Umno's Saifuddin, who is also deputy higher education minister, shot back that the BN would retain power as it had been able to win back some of the protest votes of 2008 and those who had supported the BN then were likely to continue doing so.

"The majority, is not on my side or on your side, the majority are fence sitter voters who are mostly young professionals," said the liberal Umno politician.

However, moderator and political scientist Mohammad Agus Yusoff pointed out that unlike the 1999 Reformasi uprising, the people were living comfortable lives now.

Agus said the crucial states come the next general election would be Sabah, Sarawak, Johor, Selangor and Perak, which have the lion's share of 124 of 222 seats in Parliament.

Of the 222 parliamentary seats, 43 are in Felda areas, Sabah has 25 seats and Sarawak 31, that's 56 seats, can they (Pakatan) penetrate these areas?" he asked.

The forum, organised by the Kelantan government was titled '13th General Election: BN or Pakatan

Rakyat'.

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