

BR1M does little to change corrupt BN perception

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The RM500 1Malaysia aid for low income families is seen as a gimmick and a vote-buying strategy ahead of the general election, according to several beneficiaries whom Malaysiakini has interviewed.

To some who have received the RM500 1Malaysia People's Assistance (BR1M), their long-held perception about the BN is not likely to change.

Malaysiakini spoke to several beneficiaries this week and found that many were rather wary of the assistance, even though they were happy to have received the money last month.

Most of those interviewed had applied for the assistance even if they were not in dire need of the money, but because they felt "it is our money, after all".

Only households earning a monthly income of RM3,000 and below are eligible for the aid and this applies across the board to all Malaysians living in the country, regardless of their ethnicity or voting status.

Unlike the Penang government's RM100 senior citizen's annual award, which is only for voters who are 60 years old and above, this is the first time such an aid as the BR1M is being distributed nationwide.

The distribution has been in progress since Jan 15.

Gimmick and election sweetener

S Nagenteran of Perak said many considered the BN's effort a "gimmick" to win votes before the 13th general election, which is not due until next year but is speculated that it could be called as early as June this year.

Unless there are structural changes in the government's economic policies, Nagenteran said, he considered the aid as "just a sweetener".

"If the government is sincere in helping the people, it will be better to implement the minimum wage policy. Once workers can earn above RM1,200 a month, their quality of life can be improved if they can also receive the RM500.

"But a one-off payment of RM500 is too little, even for a family of three like mine. If divided by 365 days a year, it is only RM1.40 a day or RM1.40 for each person. Is that enough to have a decent living?" asked the 30-year-old company manager.

Nagenteran said the government needed to ensure that such assistance was implemented properly, to benefit only the needy, as he knows of an individual earning more than RM3,000 a month who has also received the BR1M aid.

Corruption and vote-buying

For retired engineer Lee Wen Chao, such a one-off payment with the election around the corner smacks of corruption and vote-buying.

Lee, who is from Tanjung Bungah, said despite receiving the aid, his perception of the BN was that it "is inefficient and corrupt".

But he took the money anyway, because it is "high time the BN returns something to the people".

"If they give out this money every year, then maybe we will not think that it is a form of corruption. Perhaps, I may even start to consider whether the BN is better than the present state government," the 60-year-old voter added.

For 82-year-old Gladys Fletcher, the RM500 was a blessing and she is thankful for the aid as she lives alone. She only has one son, who lives overseas and sends her money irregularly.

But for the retired receptionist, money does not change the fact that the BN's 54 years in government is "too long".

"We still need to vote for change. If there is no change, nothing will improve. I would like to see some changes before I die... the BN has done many abuses in finance as well as in governance," she told Malaysiakini at her Bukit Gelugor home.

BN positive about aid

When told about these comments, Pulau Tikus BN coordinator Rowena Yam said she saw the BR1M award in a positive and objective manner.

Yam, who is Penang Gerakan political education bureau chief, questioned why the people did not consider the RM100 annual senior citizens' payment by the Penang government as 'corruption', since it was only meant to benefit voters in the state.

"If you want to play this game, let's play it fairly," she said when told that some recipients of the BR1M aid considered it a vote-buying move.

Despite the criticisms levelled against this BN strategy, Yam said, she hoped to see the effort continue to become a long-term move, not merely a one-off payment.

"We are still studying it to see how to improve the scheme after the first round, because we realise that despite the criteria we fixed, the application is still open to manipulation," Yam said.

"So, after this, the relevant people will meet and do a post-mortem. People like me, who are coordinators handling the payout, will share our views and hope the aid can be given on a yearly basis," she added.

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