

Separate business from politics, Ku Li tells gov't
MalaysiaKini.com
February 16,2012
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Business and money politics in the government are causing severe damage to the nation. As a result, business has become inseparable from political patronage, power and the electoral process.

This was the message Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah sent to more than 200 members of the Royal Selangor Club in Kuala Lumpur during a luncheon talk today.

"The corrupting influence of money in public life is obvious," Razaleigh said in his talk titled Malaysia's political economy and the international economic crisis.

"While the economic and social problems accumulate, a divide has been created by those who benefit from the dysfunctional system and those who suffer from it.

"It is no different from the experience of many countries in the Middle East. Many who had enjoyed the benefits of incumbent power sustained the system and were reluctant to give up power or to change," Razaleigh added.

In drawing a comparison with the Middle East, he said: "The lesson we have to learn from the Arab Spring is that a dysfunctional democracy, however well dressed by public relations exercises and the propaganda-type media, cannot withstand the realities that are the natural consequence of abuse of power and wanton accumulation of wealth.

"This is the most important message, I think, that the Arab Spring has conveyed and we must take cognisance of it.

"The danger we face is that the conflation of business and politics has become so dominant that it has the same influence an ideology would have.

"If we are to restore democratic ideals in our political discussions and the electoral process, then there must be a separation of business from politics."

'RM500 is the people's own money'

During question time, Razaleigh was asked about BN representatives giving out RM500 under a government policy to help those with incomes of less than RM3,000 a month.

The BN Gua Musang MP replied that the money given to the people was not from the BN or Umno.

"The people were merely getting back their own money, which they paid as taxes in the past."

In his 30-minute talk, Razaleigh explained that for business must be free of politics if it is to play a responsible and major role in the economy.

"The economy of business must be returned to the people in order for them to develop. It must be given the freedom to function, without having to depend on political patronage.

"The right to do business as part of the national economy must be a fundamental right, not subject to favours from politicians or bureaucrats."

As a consequence of lopsided economic policies in the past, he said, inequalities among the population

and races had widened.

"Today, Malaysians suffer from a very wide inequality, and there is a suggestion that this inequality is higher than in Thailand and Indonesia. This inequality cuts across racial boundaries.

Entire education system has to be reformed

"If the economy declines in the future, the problems that I have highlighted in terms of household debt and the widening inequality will go into a deeper crisis of confidence among the people, particularly the young who feel alienated from the economic system."

On education, Razaleigh said Malaysia needed moral courage to reform the entire education system of today.

"We need a massive adult education programme to ensure the present generation is not left behind.

"The objective of adult education should be to provide the necessary language and technical skills and to involve as large a section of the population in non-formal educational programmes that will bring about national cohesion and at the same, time rejuvenate dormant areas of our economy such as the agriculture sector.

He also criticised the privatisation policies introduced in the 90s. Privatisation, he said, which was supposed to be for public good, changed course toward private profit accumulation of wealth by the greedy few at the top.

"Changes in the Malaysian political situation created a corrupt form of public values that have very serious consequences and with which the society is burdened.

"The system became self-serving for entrenched political and business interests. All those in the hierarchy also benefited and worked in order to maintain that system," Razaleigh added.

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