

## **Of cash and coercion during GE13 in Sabah**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**May 8, 2013**

**By Jannie Lasimbang**

ANALYSIS Setting aside allegations of non-citizens having been given identity cards to vote in the 13th general election, the sad fact remains that many indigenous communities in rural Sabah who have called for a change in the system have voted for BN candidates because of money politics, threats and misinformation.

These issues remain the biggest challenge for the opposition and for groups battling for a clean and fair election.

NONEThere are overwhelming reports from rural communities of cash distribution through the ketua kampung (village heads), heads of the village development and security committees (JKKK) and BN party workers.

While some Kadazan in Penampang have said that the money handouts did not influence their vote, many others from the more remote upper Moyog area said they felt obliged to vote for BN after receiving RM50 on the night of May 4, the eve of polling day.

With the distribution of BR1M, some were defensive when challenged as to why they felt obliged to vote for BN for such a small sum. The answer was "Baayan po" equivalent to 'Syukurlah' or better than nothing.

On polling day, BN 'vouchers' were still being handed out to those who were identified as BN supporters. The 'vouchers', bearing the name and details of the voter, can later be used to claim RM100 in cash at an Umno branch office.

NONEIn Sook, Keningau, where demands for recognition of land rights issues have persisted and calls for a change in government have been made, BN received strong support in the polls after villagers were given unsigned land titles on May 3.

In one remote village in Paitan, it was reported that the PKR markas (station) was closed down after BN paid RM500 to its leader. This was also reported in a number of other villages. This closure meant that the opposition did not have a place to gather.

Apparently, many villagers in remote villages in Paitan felt obliged to vote for BN after receiving RM50-100 in cash.

Community leaders who were hoping that a change in government would end their longstanding land woes lamented "Kuat bah itu duit" (money is powerful).

#### Threats to revoke allocations

Another effective method used by the BN in rural villages was by threatening the cancellation of promised allocations for houses meant for those in hardcore poverty, and even the likelihood of taking back houses and water-tanks already given to them, should BN lose.

NONE In the remote villages of Tandek in Kota Marudu, outsiders were stopped from entering the village by village and JKKK leaders on the instruction of the BN leaders there.

Community members were warned not to come out of their house if outsiders came to visit. Villagers described this action of their own community leaders as "kejam" (cruel) and disrespectful. The opposition was not allowed to use any of the public facilities or to organise ceramahs.

Despite their litany of problems that have persisted for years, these communities have never known another system of government for 50 years, and the possibilities that could come with a more committed and bold state and federal governments.

#### Blatant lies

Communities in remote villages are cut off from access to other forms of information apart from local radio and TV stations, which have been used as a tool for BN propaganda. As a result, they were very easily swayed by misinformation.

Issues relating to systemic corruption, abuse of power and funds, cronyism and human rights abuse are unheard of in remote areas simply because such information is not within their reach.

azlan In Kg Lingkobungan 1 in Tandek in Kota Marudu, communities were told blatant lies by BN leaders that the owners of a plantation company that had destroyed their crops and their land belongs to PKR's Anwar Ibrahim and Lajim Ukin (left).

This extremely remote village, which was dislocated from an area near a river to a hillslope with limited gravity water-supply by the company, did not have any access to information or the means to verify the claim.

In contrast, remote villages in Pensiangan and Nabawan who were able to receive information, and were more open to hear of options offered by other parties, were not swayed in exercising their willingness to change the government through the ballot box.

#### Politics of personality

Many indigenous communities in rural Sabah wanting a change of government were divided between Pakatan Rakyat and Star, resulting in split votes and giving victory back to the BN.

These include the state constituencies of Kiulu, Kundasang, Paginatan, Tambunan, Liawan, Melalap, Nabawan and Elopura.

For parliamentary seats, a united opposition could have won an additional four seats in Kota Marudu, Tenom, Pensiangan and Keningau.

NONEA divided opposition resulted not only in splitting communities but in dashed hopes for a change in government.

In many ways, the rural electorate of Sabah has been denied an effective voice through the election process to influence political parties to take their issues seriously because they are easily influenced by political personalities and promises of what they can do.

Without a more comprehensive understanding of good governance, the role of Parliament and the state legislative assembly, it would be difficult for rural electorate to see a complete picture of the role of political parties.