

Jeffrey on Taib's 'dependency syndrome' formula
Malaysiakini.com
June 25, 2010

Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) vice-president Jeffrey Kitingan isn't surprised that Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud is claiming that grinding poverty would keep the native voters humble and continuing to support the BN as they are dependent on the government.

NONETaib recently said he was confident of the bumiputeras' continuing support despite the loss of largely-Chinese Sibuan in a parliamentary by-election on May 16. BN had been holding the seat for 28 years.

"All this makes us wonder what Taib has been doing for the last 30 years in Sarawak under his so-called politics of development," said Jeffrey.

According to the Sabah opposition strongman, he has researched the "dependency syndrome" in depth and was rewarded for his troubles with incarceration under the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA) in 1991 and released only a month before the 1994 state elections in Sabah.

He was apparently released to ensure that his continued incarceration would not become an issue in the elections.

"What Taib has expressed about poverty in Sarawak is the hidden agenda of every BN politician in the country," charged Jeffrey. "It is the BN philosophy that the people are easier to organise, control and manipulate if large numbers of them are kept perpetually down and out.

Plotting integral to politics

"They form assured vote banks. This is why the BN has erected a subsidy regime especially for the rural areas."

Jeffrey, whose party focus is on Sabah and Sarawak, said he had pointed this out in a study which he undertook before he was taken in under the ISA.

Former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad took offence over his academic leanings on the issue, he stressed, and warned him that "it's not necessary to tell the people (in Sabah) what they don't know".

penan woman and son sarawak survival internationalMahathir was then getting increasingly suspicious over Jeffrey's Yayasan Pembangunan Insan (People's Development Institute) initiatives in Sabah under his brother, Joseph Pairin's, administration.

Mahathir, unknown to the Kitingan brothers at that time, was then plotting the entry of Umno into Sabah and saw a readily available pool of the poverty-stricken as the key to political control of the state.

Had the YPI programmes been allowed to continue, said Jeffrey, Sabah among would not be among the poorest states in Malaysia today along with Sarawak, Kelantan and Terengganu.

Citing Sarawak as a case in point, he said that large numbers of the Iban living in longhouses are desperately poor with literacy levels of only 30 percent, the lowest in

Malaysia.

"It's these Iban that form the core of Taib's support every election," said Jeffrey. "It's a system that is both feudal and tribal-mentality based. It is worked through the legislators and a network of headmen employed and paid by the state government."

An equivalent pool of the vulnerable in Sabah, alleged Jeffrey, are the illegal immigrants who have been given MyKads and placed on the electoral rolls to vote for Sabah Umno.

These voters are kept on a tight leash by the powers-that-be, he adds, "as they are not allowed to even travel outside the state. They would be stopped at the airport if they tried to leave".

Campaigning in the Iban longhouses is an uphill task for the opposition, according to Jeffrey, since the local Village Security and Development Committees (JKKK) put a lot of impediments in their way.

Uphill task for opposition

The JKKK will even ban the entry of opposition party workers and candidates in the last three days in the run-up to polling day, he alleged. "It's during these three days that BN will embark on its mixture of threats - even employing hired goons and the police - and bribes to swing the longhouse votes its way."

Jeffrey faults Dayak legislators and village headmen for the system that props up Taib.

pkr batang ai sarawak state election campaign 100309 04The PKR strategist for Sabah and Sarawak saw the BN campaign tactics employed first-hand during the Batang Ai by-election in 2009 which turned out to be a disaster for his party.

He has noted that the main thrust of the BN in the rural areas is to take away the people's land for the development of huge plantations, reducing them to landless peasantry in the process, in order to make them readily available as cheap labour for the estates.

"This is done as part of the so-called process of bringing them into the money economy and taking them statistically out of the poverty bracket," said Jeffrey. "We have seen that in the emergence of an Indian underclass after nearly 200 years of estate development in peninsular Malaysia."

Jeffrey does not see why what has not worked in peninsular Malaysia should work in Sabah and Sarawak.

In Sarawak, in particular, thousands of the rural poor have lost their native land to big companies from West Malaysia through Taib and his family and their cronies, he alleged.

"The land policies in Sarawak are particularly harsh to the extent that the state government even ignores court decisions in favour of native landowners."

The exploitative system in rural Sarawak will be a thing of the past once the Pakatan forms the state government, Jeffrey added. "Likewise, we will re-figure the various land schemes set up in West Malaysia to create captive voters for Umno."

Pakatan had pledged in its 2008 election manifesto that it will return the land to the people

in Sarawak.

The goal is to encourage the emergence of a network of small and independent farmers working their own land as masters of their own destiny.

The opposition coalition has plans to provide them with rural credit and market access, similar to what is being done in Australia and New Zealand.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/135562>