

Austerity, BN style
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In the light of financial scandals of fantastic proportions and more plunder-prone projects on the drawing-board or actually underway, it was astonishing last week to read of the claim by Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin that the federal government "has been practising fiscal austerity".

Certainly the government is crying poor as far as public welfare is concerned, claiming to be unable to afford sufficient scholarships for gifted students or to continue subsidising staples like fuel, food and utilities. Or indeed any basic services at all for a great many rural people.

military malaysia navy french built submarine scorpene classBut it shows no sign of cutting back on the billions it continues to sink into the purchase, arming and maintenance of the scandal-plagued Scorpene submarines, or of retrieving any of the funds lost, stolen or squandered in the estimated RM12 billion Port Klang Free Zone fiasco.

In fact it is even, as we speak, considering paying one of the PKFZ contractors, Kuala Dimensi, another RM700 million.

Then there's the splendid new palace that is being built for the Agong at a cost of hundreds more millions of ringgit. And the only aspect of austerity apparent in this case is, as usual, towards the workers on the project, who are allegedly either pitifully paid or else not paid at all by one or more of the contractors.

Another massive expenditure the government has mooted is a new, RM800-million parliament building, though that appears to have been temporarily put on hold.

Wholesale plunder of the public purse proceeds apace, however, with the projected development, without open tender, of priceless tracts of real estate including the site of the old Pudu Jail and the Sungei Besi airport.

Then there's the mysterious disappearance of hundreds of billions of ringgit from the cash reserves of the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda).

The government values the fall in reserves over the past five years at RM2.9 billion, claiming that the funds have been spent on replanting, a poverty-eradication in Sabah, and a RM662-million payment to Naza TTDI for work in progress on a new headquarters building for Felda.

'Slim pickings for the people'

But Kelantan state exco member Husam Musa disputes the government's story about the disbursement of the funds, and also claims that the missing amount may be triple the sum officially admitted to, or more like RM8 billion.

So all things considered, far from the 'fiscal austerity' Muhyiddin Yassin claims that the government is practicing, this looks to me suspiciously like business as usual: fat projects, commissions and fees for BN and its cronies, and slim pickings for the rest of the Malaysian people.

bn supreme council mt meeting sapp sabah issue 190608 taib mahmud This system has been honed to such a pitch of perfection in Sarawak that chief minister Taib Mahmud (right) has made himself a multi-billionaire during his thirty years in office – and left the bulk of his state's population mired in dire poverty.

A situation of which Taib appears proud, considering his triumphant recent announcement that BN is electorally safe in Sarawak because "The bumiputeras are humble. They know they are poor and in difficulty. So they place high hopes in the government to help them out."

According to BN-crony 'news' agency Bernama, he added that in the (Sibu) by-election, though there were people from outside trying to undermine their confidence in the government, the Malays, Ibans, Melanau and others had been "humble enough to recognize that they still depend on a working government for their fate."

Note that Taib speaks not of the 'welfare' or 'future' of his constituents, but their 'fate', as if he considers them his serfs or slaves.

As indeed he does, according to PKR vice-president Jeffrey Kitingan, who was quoted by Joe Fernandez in an article for Malaysiakini as saying that "what Taib has expressed about poverty in Sarawak is the hidden agenda of every BN politician in the country. It is the BN philosophy that the people are easier to organize, control and manipulate if large numbers of them are kept perpetually down and out."

Extorting the poor

Besides keeping the people desperately poor, Kitingan added, in the run-up to an election "BN will embark on its mixture of threats - even employing hired goons and the police - and bribes to swing the longhouse votes its way."

Speaking of bribes for voters, Prime Minister Najib Razak (below) recently replied to a parliamentary question from member for Sibu, Wong Ho Leng, that the RM37.7 millions that BN promised or allocated in the Sibu by-election were "not carrots for votes."

"The government has never promised projects or programmes for the public during by-election campaigns," Najib reportedly added, "including in Sibu."

NONE Considering the government's astonishing lack of austerity when it comes to trying to buy by-elections, and Najib's now notorious "You help me, I help you" offer of RM5 million on condition of a BN victory in Sibu, this only serves to remind us how economical the BN regime is with the truth.

In recent days we've been treated to not only Muhyiddin's mendacity about fiscal austerity and Najib's deceitful denial of BN electoral bribery, but a whole litany of lies on other topics that it's impossible to keep track of them all.

But two that especially stick in my mind are Khairy Jamaludin's laughable claim that he and Najib Razak are both "reformers," and the falsehood implicit in former prime minister Abdullah Badawi's assertion in a speech at a seminar organized by the Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding that "secular human rights should be abandoned because these eventually poison the mind and lead to the irrelevance of spirituality, divinity and morality."

What a load of sanctimonious rubbish. 'Religious' governments around the world, from

Saudi Arabia to Somalia, Pakistan to Sudan, Afghanistan to Iran, Mauritania to Malaysia, are not only virtually devoid of human rights, secular or otherwise, but also conspicuously lacking in spirituality, divinity and morality.

Entirely contrary to Badawi's claim, it's not human rights that poison the mind, but the lack of them. As any fool can see, any government's denial or abandonment of human rights leads not to virtue, but to corruption, criminality and vice. Plus as much austerity as possible for the 'umma', and obscene prosperity for the powers that be.

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