

Helping supporters is not graft, says Sabah leader
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A Sabah Umno leader today told the Umno general assembly of the need for a system that would "help" look out for the welfare of party leaders' *anak buah* (followers).

Former chief minister and Kota Belud delegate Salleh Said Keruak said it is only fair that the party takes care of its leaders' followers, who sacrifice a lot in supporting and championing Umno's ideals.

"We understand the concerns raised over tenders, but we have to accept the fact that if we don't help them (followers), who will?," he said when debating Umno president Najib Abdul Razak's policy speech.

"We need to look out for the welfare of our followers... we need a system to help our followers."

Salleh (*left*), the first speaker of the day, added that the federal government needs to also help the Sabah state government in disbursement of contracts to locals under federal development projects in Sabah.

He said while the state is happy with the multi-billion ringgit development projects for Sabah outlined by Najib's Budget 2011 last Friday, the government must make sure that local contractors benefit.

Citing the "fixed deposit" tag given by Najib to Sabah and neighbouring Sarawak, Salleh said that "recognition" of the importance of the two East Malaysian states should be reflected by greater autonomy given to the state government in managing the allocated funds.

The Sabah Umno deputy liaison chief lamented that there are many cases where Sabahan bumiputera contractors, particularly the class F licensees, are not even given the light of day on available contracts, hinting at a monopoly by their counterparts from peninsular Malaysia.

"We need to respect this 'fixed deposit'. We have no problem if contracts are given out on limited tender or even direct negotiation, but if there are areas where the local contractors can do the work, then why not just let the locals do it? Even a 50/50 (split in contracts) would be fine.

"If we can help, then we should help. Helping (bumiputeras) is not corruption, it is a responsibility," he said.

'Fill their stomachs first'

Salleh, meanwhile, urged Umno to take up Najib's challenge to transform to remain relevant in the country's increasingly competitive political arena.

Touching on the poor support from youths, he pointed out that a 'one-size-fits-all' policy will not work if Umno, and the BN coalition, hope to tap into the 4 million-strong base of new

voters.

He said youths choose to be anti-establishment because it is trendy, and pointed out that it is incumbent on Umno to counter that by actively engaging the youths and explaining to them the BN's many positive policies that benefit the people.

"We cannot talk to youths and immediately go 'Malay this, Malay that'. They will say 'I'm hungry'.

"To win over the youths, you have to win the stomach first. Youths want business opportunities, jobs... we need to fulfil that first and then we can talk about inviting them to join our cause and struggle," he said.

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