

Food for votes: Police report lodged
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A police report by the Coalition for Clean and Fair Election (Bersih) was made last night in Machap Baru police station against several top Barisan Nasional party leaders for alleged corrupt practices during the Machap by-elections.

The BN leaders named in the report were BN's Machap candidate Lai Meng Chong, Umno Youth chief Hishammuddin Hussein, Umno Youth vice chief Khairy Jamaluddin and MCA Youth chief Liow Tiong Lai.

The report, lodged on behalf of Bersih by Dr Xavier Jeyakumar, was based on an Oriental Daily report two days ago which had these leaders pictured while handing out food to residents in Machap (right) - an act considered corrupt under Section 8 of the Election Offences Act 1954.

A person is guilty under this offence known as 'treating' if he gives or provides any food, drink, refreshment or provision for the purpose of corruptly influencing others to give their vote during elections.

The punishment includes imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years and a fine not exceeding RM5000.

The offender will also be incapable of being elected at any election or if at that date he has been elected at any election, his seat shall be vacated from the date of such conviction.

"Corruption erodes our democracy and it disrupts the prerogative of the voter," said Xavier in a statement.

"We urge the police to conduct investigations immediately on these four politicians," he added.

Election watchdog Bersih is a joint committee comprising 64 civil society organisations and political parties with the objective of campaigning for free and fair elections in Malaysia.

Windfall for settlers

This is not the first corruption claim made against Lai and BN officials.

Last Friday, Lai was accused of being involved in money politics in the run up to the polls by his opponent, DAP's Liou Chen Kuang.

The accusations against Lai stemmed from a report in the Sin Chew Daily that Lai had promised allocations between RM6,000 and RM13,000 for five families for housing repairs and construction.

"It is clear that Lai had misused government funds and state machinery for his party and his own gain. This is an act of bribing the voters," Liou had said on Friday.

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak too came under criticism for vote-buying practice by allocating RM3.7 million for Felda Tun Ghafar Baba Hutan Percha settlers in Machap on April 10.

Najib had announced the windfall in the run-up to the Machap by-election due on Thursday to the settlers at a carnival-like event called 'An Evening with Najib', complete with red tents, a stage and a music band.

"Ada ubi ada batas, ada budi boleh balas. Kalau nak balas, balas pada April 12 dan undilah Barisan Nasional," he told the crowd.

(One should repay or return favours when the time is right and the favour should be repaid by voting BN on April 12).

Polling started this morning at 8am after nine days of campaigning by both parties. Results are expected at about 8.30pm tonight.

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