

Wan Azizah laments 'rising poll nastiness'
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Parti Keadilan Rakyat president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail has deplored what she called "the rising level of nastiness" in electoral campaigns.

She said the trend must be checked to prevent Malaysians from accepting "a culture of baseness" as normative to the democratic process.

Referring to physical clashes that occurred at the Machap by-election and on nomination day for the upcoming poll for the Ijok state seat, including the roughing up of PKR candidate Khalid Ibrahim, Wan Azizah said:

"This trend towards violence is deplorable and must be checked and stamped out with all deliberate speed. Otherwise it will lead to a culture of baseness that Malaysians abjure but would be powerless to prevent if a few, protected by powerful patrons, are allowed to ride roughshod."

In remarks made to malaysiakini today, Wan Azizah recalled Cory Aquino's famously glinting phrase - "guns, goons and gold" - that encapsulated the former Philippine leader's denunciation of tactics employed by incumbent dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippine presidential campaign of 1986.

"The guns, goons and gold culture should never be imported or imitated in the Malaysian electoral process," she said.

"I'm not saying we are anywhere near this description but if you extrapolate on current trends, you can envisage a future akin to that description," she added.

Better to stay out

The PKR leader fretted that the rising crime rate in the country, the reports of gangsters controlling certain towns, the suspect freeing of underworld figures from preventive detention and tardiness in investigating and prosecuting the corrupt have contributed to a "culture of baseness."

"This culture of baseness will spread and infect the body politic. Once that happens it will be impossible to stem the tide and reverse it," said Wan Azizah.

Already, she said it is a known fact that the vast majority of the 4.9 million Malaysians who have not registered as voters are in the 21 to 35 age bracket.

The figures indicate that one in three eligible Malaysians are not concerned to exercise their democratic right to vote. Only 10.3 million of Malaysia's 27 million population are registered voters.

"If the young perceive a rising level of nastiness in the electoral process, they will not be persuaded to participate. They will think it is for ruffians and thugs and conclude it is better for them to stay out," said Wan Azizah.

"We have to protect the young from the cynicism of money politics and its concomitant trend - a politics influenced by goons - so that they will take part in the electoral process and not be apathetic," she added.

"I fear for the young. They do not seem to think that they can influence their electoral destinies and this bodes ill for the country," lamented Wan Azizah.

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