

In Umno polls, contractors rule
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Take a closer look at delegates to the Umno polls next March and be very afraid - the bulk of voting power will be concentrated in the hands of 1,560 contractors.

Former Sabah attorney-general (AG) Herman Luping made this observation in an opinion piece entitled 'Money politics the new curse in our society', in yesterday's edition of the Kuching-based Borneo Post.

dr herman lupingLuping, citing a 'reliable source', wrote that contractors will make up 60 percent of some 2,600 delegates at the next Umno general assembly.

"About 25 percent of the delegates are professionals in various fields while five percent are businessmen and party veterans," he said, without accounting for the rest.

Luping noted that the situation is a far cry from the early years and even as late as the 1970s and 1980s when (Malay school) teachers initially and small businessmen later made up the overwhelming majority of Umno delegates.

"Those were the days when delegates would spend their spare time working for the party through their respective divisions on a 'voluntary' basis. No money was involved and nothing was demanded in return," Luping wrote, citing his source.

"... Umno delegates these days are more discerning and 'demanding'. It can be very good for the nation. Except, of course, the use of money to buy votes and influence people. This 'political curse' we can do without."

mahathir and umno 190508 02In his cautious piece, he touched on former Umno president Dr Mahathir Mohamad's threat to reveal the names of members those allegedly involved in money politics; his failure to combat money politics in his time; money politics a la the timber curse in Sabah; and where to draw the line between money politics and party work.

najib tun razak 040808He noted without comment party deputy president Najib Abdul Razak's recent pledge that Umno would take several more measures to check money politics, that the problem cannot realistically be resolved in the near future, and that efforts to eradicate it should be supported by strong political will and commitment.

"Efforts in tackling money politics involved a process that needed a certain time frame because even ... Mahathir ... had initiated efforts to eliminate money politics," Najib is quoted as saying.

Problem in all parties

Mention is made of the Anti-Corruption Agency's arrest of two politicians in Sabah, who had allegedly bribed members at the recent Umno party divisional elections. No charges have been filed against them so far.

"We do not hear much about money politics amongst other BN component party members.

It is not unlikely that politicians in the coalition partners do not indulge in money politics. The problem of money politics is in fact the problem of every political party in the country," said Luping.

"Buying votes at party elections is a common practice. It had happened before and will continue to happen for a long time, as long as there are over-ambitious politicians in our midst.

"The buying of votes at party elections, however, is a recent happening, a recent phenomenon. The problem was not there in the early stages of our political history. This is especially so in Sabah."

However, Luping said he does not recall spending money to buy votes or influence people to vote for him when he was in United PasokMomogun Kadazan Organisation (Upko) or in United Sabah National Organisation, which Upko members joined en masse after dissolving their party.

Leaders then took it for granted that people would vote for them for their commitment to the party and the state. Even party workers and those who helped campaign for candidates did so on a voluntary basis.

umno money politicsIt was not until the mid-70s that money politics crept in and more funds were needed for campaigning purposes.

Even so, it was discovered in 1976 that several candidates in fact didn't even spend the money allocated to them by the party but had, instead, pocketed it.

"Today, money politics have also set in (during) general elections. This too cannot be avoided as people who come out to help in the campaign must be compensated..."

"Blatant direct buying of votes is wrong. But is it also wrong if candidates for positions in the party to pay their campaigners?"

'Contain new curse'

Luping made a distinction between "the curse of money politics" and the "timber curse" which, according to him, began when Fuad (Donald) Stephens was appointed the first chief minister of Sabah two weeks before the formation of Malaysia on Sept 16, 1963.

Stephens came up with his infamous 4Ks - kayu, kaya, kerja, kampung - rationale for the exploitation of the timber resources in the state.

loggingThe colonial government itself had awarded four timber concessions to bumiputera politicians to help build them up financially for the political struggles to follow, but they made up a small number compared to the 43 concessions leased to non-bumiputeras.

Even so, Stephens' timber policies did not prevent the Sabah Alliance crisis of 1964, noted Luping.

After he left the CM's post, Stephens penned a bitter article entitled 'Timber curse in Sabah politics' in 1965 in the North Borneo News which he owned.

The crisis in Sabah politics since then has been engineered by politicians struck by the "sure get rich quick" phenomenon of the 'timber curse'.

"Money politics is the new curse in our society. It has become the new syndrome, the new 'culture' that our leaders have to deal with and contain," added Luping.

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