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BACKTRACKING

DR M MAKES THIRD U-TURN ON BR1M

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We will scale down cash aid if we come to power, says ex-PM

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FORMER prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has made yet another U-turn on the Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M) scheme, this time saying Pakatan Harapan will "gently" remove the cash aid if the opposition comes to power.

This is his third U-turn on the financial aid scheme.

In December last year, Dr Mahathir, who is Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) chairman, said BR1M was tantamount to bribery and was therefore, illegal and a crime.

However, during his speech at PPBM's launch on Jan 14, Dr Mahathir said the opposition coalition would not only retain BR1M, but also make it statutory.

But, in an interview with an online news portal published yes-

terday, Dr Mahathir suggested that Pakatan Harapan would gradually scale down the cash handout and repeal the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Asked whether Pakatan Harapan would remove BR1M, he said: "Gently... now, the people like to get free money.

"If you stop the free money then people would be disappointed."

He also labelled people who received BR1M as "corrupt", saying it would take time to change them into "honest people".

"So, we will reduce all these things. BR1M, for instance, is an extension of normal support we give to the very poor and disabled people.

"We used to give money to them monthly, but (Prime Minister Datuk Seri) Najib (Razak) gives to more people.

"So much so, the government now does not have money for development," he said in the interview.

Political analysts said Dr Ma-

hathir's frequent U-turns were a sign that he was confused about the BR1M programme, which was introduced by the government in 2012.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's Dr Mazlan Ali said Dr Mahathir saw BR1M as a beneficial programme, but showed strong opposition towards it because of his disapproval of Najib's leadership.

"Dr Mahathir knows that BR1M is good for the people.

"But because he does not agree with Najib's leadership

style, he sees that all government policies are bad, when they're not," he told the *New Straits Times* yesterday.

Meanwhile, Professor Sivamugan Pandian said the opposition coalition must state clearly their stand on cash handouts in their election manifesto, to ensure that voters would not be confused by their leaders' contradicting statements.



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad