

Bersih: Lopsided MP funding 'crime against democracy'
The Malaysian Insider
September 05, 2011
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 5 — Bersih 2.0 today lashed out at what it called unfair funds distribution to federal lawmakers by the Barisan Nasional (BN) government, labelling the lopsided allocation a "crime against democracy" for omitting opposition-dominated constituencies.

The electoral reform watchdog stressed that all Malaysians must have fair access to development funds and not be discriminated against because of political affiliations or socio-cultural background.

"[The] Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections 2.0 (Bersih 2.0) condemns as a crime against democracy the reported discriminatory practices where constituency funds would be given to the BN representatives based on the BN's electability," the group's steering committee said in a statement today.

Sin Chew Daily, a Chinese-language newspaper, had reported that special cash allocations from Putrajaya to upgrade infrastructure and engage constituents through programmes and welfare aid can run as high as RM2.5 million for certain constituencies.

But it further reported that no special allocations would be made for "black" areas, where BN lost both state and federal seats in the historic Election 2008 that saw the ruling coalition ceding the two-thirds parliamentary majority that allows them to approve laws on their own.

The Chinese daily also reported that BN has classified constituencies as "black", "grey" and "white" areas. "Grey" areas — where BN and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) both hold seats or where the ruling federal coalition won marginally — will receive between RM1 million and RM2 million.

Allocations will be distributed accordingly to MPs in "white" areas where BN holds federal and state seats.

In comparison, the Selangor Pakatan Rakyat government allocated RM1 million to each of its assemblymen last January for constituency projects, but excluded BN representatives.

PR has tenuous control over the country's most developed state, holding 36 seats in the 56-seat state assembly and 17 out of 22 parliamentary seats.

Today, Bersih condemned the use of development funds in order to reward voter loyalty, and urged political parties from continuing to "misuse" such allocations to bolster support.

"Treating constituency fund as an election tool to induce support is a shameless and corrupt act of misusing public funds; it is an insult to the celebration of Merdeka, as voters should not be effectively forced to vote for a particular party in order to gain access to this funding.

"Bersih 2.0 calls upon the federal and all state governments — from both BN and PR to respect democracy and stop the current practices of giving constituency development funds

to only their party representatives. This latest discriminatory practice is but the height of such feudal and kleptocratic mentality," the steering committee said.

It later added that there was a need for laws to "prohibit and criminalise all misconduct that blurs the boundary between party and state or which abuses state resources for partisan purposes".

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