

Electoral graft due to voter expectations, say pundits
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By Melissa Chi

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 11 — Voters may not realise it but they are promoting corruption among politicians by demanding handouts, pundits said today.

A political academic, an independent think-tank chief and two lawmakers from opposing sides suggested today that the public is responsible for encouraging politicians to offer handouts in return for electoral support.

Nurul Izzah agreed that people have high expectations of their MP. — File pic
“The rakyat should not have this very high expectation that their MPs should be a Superman ...,” said Anis Yusal Yusoff, adding “that the MPs have to be there [is] because obviously you are promoting corruption without realising [it].”

The Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) principal research fellow said that many Malaysians expect their MPs to give money but when the MP “donates” RM10, he would be criticised for being stingy.

“This is the problem because of that expectation,” Anis Yusal said.

However, he said some MPs were partly to be blamed as they liked to behave “as if they are Superman.”

The practice of offering handouts, whether in cash or in kind, has been likened by various transparency groups as a form of vote-buying and tantamount to an act of corruption.

PKR MP for Lembah Pantai Nurul Izzah Anwar appeared to agree with the UKM researcher’s comment.

She quipped in reply: “Nak menang brother [Want to win brother].”

Both were on a panel at an open discussion titled “Empowering liberal democratic institutions” organised by the Institute of Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) today.

Kota Belud MP Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan also agreed with the academic’s analysis, saying society must change its mindset if reforms were to take hold.

“The people must also reform. It’s a chicken-and-egg situation,” the Umno backbencher said.

Abdul Rahman said society must change its mindset.

Abdul Rahman said as an MP, he had no idea what voters were talking about, and cited his Sabah constituents as an example because the “culture of writing to MPs does not exist in this country.”

“We do not know what you guys are talking about,” he said.

The Umno lawmaker, however, seemed to think that it was the duty of independent think-tanks like IDEAS to act as a "third force" to educate voters about their duty to combat corruption among politicians.

"I think this is what IDEAS should be doing. Go to the ground, educate the people and make their views known to their representatives.

"I think we have a big problem of reforming Parliament or the whole system of governance in this country," Abdul Rahman said.

IDEAS chief executive officer Wan Saiful Wan Jan, who was the moderator, agreed with the panellists.

He said: "Society needs to change as well. I think it's unfair that we have been blaming the politicians for so long when it's actually society who expects you to behave like that and if you don't you will lose."

The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government has been repeatedly attacked by its political foes and anti-corruption organisations for giving cash handouts, bonus and pay hikes as well as various forms of financial aid to various groups in the lead up to the 13th general election, rumoured to be called this year.

Since promising massive cash handouts and bonuses announced in Budget 2012 last year, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has been approaching Malaysia's multicultural and multireligious communities one by one for support and offering diverse forms of incentives in return.

The most recent example was during the Thaipusam celebration last Tuesday when he announced that the government will allocate RM2 million to build a cultural centre at the Lord Muruga temple grounds in Batu Caves.

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