

**Cash handouts may stay if BN wins, says Shafie**  
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IPOH, Feb 12 — One-off cash handouts now being paid by the Barisan Nasional (BN) government may become permanent if the coalition is returned to Putrajaya, Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal was quoted saying by Bernama Online today.

“It (yearly financial aid) will not be a problem, if the economy continues to grow and the BN remains in power,” the minister said in the report.

The rural and regional development minister also denied there was a hidden purpose behind the cash handouts.

“This (financial assistance) has no political motive... we give out assistance to deserving people and the government has enough financial strength to carry out the scheme,” he was quoted further by Bernama Online.

Shafie was responding to a call by Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng for the RM100 cash aid for school children and RM500 Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M) for low-income families announced in Budget 2012 to be made an annual affair.

Lim yesterday suggested that failure to do so would lead to the two assistance schemes being viewed as vote-buying measures.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had tabled a Budget for this year themed “National Transformation Policy: Welfare for the Rakyat, Well-Being of the Nation”, which included RM2.5 billion in cash handouts and a pay increase for the country’s 1.3 million civil servants worth RM2 billion.

Najib must call for a general election by May 2013, but is believed to considering an earlier date.

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