

PKR: Pay hike won't solve armed forces, civil servants woes
Malaysian Insider
March 12, 2013
By Syed Jaymal Zahiid

PETALING JAYA, March 12 — Putrajaya's move to increase the pay of police and armed forces personnel will not solve much of the financial woes afflicting the security forces, especially those in the army, who are still without a social safety net once they leave the service, PKR said today.

The Najib administration had agreed to streamline the salaries of uniformed voters to be on par with other civil servants, announcing yesterday an extra allocation of RM1.5 billion to boost the wages of those without increment last year in a move seen to be shoring up support for BN in the upcoming polls.

"The issue is not about the pay hike, but when they leave the service, where they struggle the most because there is no social safety net for them. It (increment) does not help them," party strategic Rafizi Ramli told reporters here, pointing out that most ex-army personnels often struggle to survive with their low pension.

The PKR leader noted that Putrajaya had yet to produce concrete policies to tackle longstanding issues like army housing and poor welfare.

Several ex-military officers now with the opposition claim low-ranked army personnels live in shoddy housings while their equipments are of sub-par qualities due to widespread corruption.

Rafizi said the pay hike, announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday showed his administration's lack of understanding on the primary concerns of the security forces.

"Their main concern is not just their salaries. It is what happens after they leave the service. For army men, they get a one-off payment by Lembaga Tabung Angkatan Tentera (LTAT) when they leave.

"They don't have a proper network to assist them (after leaving the force). Therefore, raising their salary by RM100 to RM150 does not really assist them," he said.

Najib had also announced a pay rise for the country's 1.4 million civil servants, between RM80 and RM320 as part of their annual increments on July 1.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) yesterday promised to match and improve on any promise by the prime minister to raise salaries and allowances should it wrest federal power.

The move illustrated the race to court civil servants, who form a key demographic among the 13.3 million voters eligible to cast their ballots in this year's general election.

PAS and its allies, the DAP and PKR, bloodied BN's nose in Election 2008 by denying the ruling coalition a two-thirds parliamentary majority. The three parties won 82 parliamentary seats and four more states and later agreed to form PR.

The opposition bloc's lynchpin PKR has been on an all-out offensive to tap into some of the 250,000 voters living in police barracks and military camps nationwide. To aid its campaign, the party has recruited former generals and senior police officers into its ranks. Their influence would be crucial to sway the demographic into PR's fold, party leaders said.

Analysts polled by The Malaysian Insider believe the salary raise for the armed forces will not necessarily mean strengthened support for the ruling coalition.

One analyst, however, has described the wage increase promises by both sides of the political divide as a "new form of money politics".

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