

BN giving free flights to Sabahans for votes, says NGO
Malaysian Insider
April 9, 2013
By Boo Su-Lyn

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 — Barisan Nasional (BN) is offering free return flights to Sabahans living in the peninsula to cast their votes in the Borneo state in Election 2013 in exchange for their support, an NGO said today.

A leader of the NGO said that people manning the BN operations room in Kuala Lumpur, based in the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) building on Jalan Raja Laut, recruited her yesterday to register Sabahan voters interested in the offer.

"They said 'if can, vote BN lah'," she told The Malaysian Insider today, requesting anonymity.

"But if they want to vote for the opposition, don't be too obvious'. Meaning, don't wear opposition clothes," she said, adding that her NGO worked on welfare matters with the Kadazandusun community here.

She said that free return flights were offered for Sabahan voters living in Kuala Lumpur, Penang or Johor Baru to go to major cities and towns in Sabah like Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan or Tawau four days before polling day, which is expected to be on April 27, and to return to the peninsula either the day after polling day or four days after.

"It's for registered voters only, but if you have a husband or wife and small kids, you can bring them along," she said.

"The arrangement is I submit the names and IC numbers to the operations room," she added.

News portal Free Malaysia Today reported Sabah DAP chief Dr Hiew King Cheu (picture) as saying in 2010 that there are some 160,000 to 200,000 Sabahans working in the peninsula, with a large number hailing from the interior of Sabah, including Ranau and Tambunan.

The opposition only won a single parliamentary seat and a state seat in Sabah in Election 2008, where the DAP secured the Kota Kinabalu parliamentary seat and the Sri Tanjong state seat in Tawau.

Hiew won the Kota Kinabalu seat with a razor-thin majority of 106 votes.

BN took the Sandakan parliamentary seat with Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) president Datuk V.K. Liew scoring a majority of only 176 votes.

Sabah Progressive Party's (SAPP) Datuk Chua Soon Bui secured the Tawau parliamentary seat under the BN ticket with a 4,867-vote majority.

SAPP, however, left the ruling coalition in September 2008 after the historic 2008 general election that saw BN lose its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and cede four states — Perak, Penang, Selangor and Kedah — to the loose opposition pact of PAS, the DAP and PKR that later formed Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

In Election 2008, BN lost its supermajority largely due to significant losses in the peninsula, where it won 85 seats while the opposition swept 80 seats.

BN, however, trounced the opposition in Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan with a near-clean sweep, winning 55 parliamentary seats to the opposition's two.

The NGO leader said today that she was unsure if the voters who took up the offer of free flights would be given pocket money as well.

"According to them, when the flight lands in KK, there will be one counter where they register. Don't know whether there will be a handout," she said, referring to the Sabah capital by its initials.

"But if I were the people, why not just take it? It's your money. When you're in the cubicle, it's your own business," she added, stressing that she would not necessarily vote for BN.

Election 2013 is expected to be the tightest election in recent times as BN gears up to face a formidable opposition pact.

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