

Umno's fear tactic controls rural Malays
Malaysian Insider
Sept 16 , 2013
BY LEE SHI-IAN

Rural Malays have been fed the same propaganda for the past 56 years - without Umno, you will die as all your possessions will be taken by the Chinese and Indians, said academician Dr Azmi Sharom.

"Basically, it is 'vote for us or lose everything'. Alternative choices and views are blocked due to the machinery which Umno has put in place over the past 50 years," said Azmi, an associate professor at the faculty of law in Universiti Malaya.

He said it was very odd that the Malays did not question why after half a century, the vast majority of the poor were still Malay households.

Azmi cited the theft of Malay reserve land for example, adding that only the government could take away such land.

"It is still the same old faces in the government, still controlled by Umno. Time and time again, the Chinese and Indians have been blamed for the theft of Malay reserve land when it is not possible for them to do so," he said.

He was speaking at a forum titled "50 years of democracy: Has it weakened or strengthened our Federal Constitution", presented by the Malaysian Centre for Constitutionalism and Human Rights (MCCHR).

Other speakers included lawyer Tommy Thomas and Wan Saiful Wan Jan, the chief executive of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs. The forum was moderated by Bersih 2.0 co-chair Datuk S. Ambiga.

Thomas said the recent economic programmes Najib had announced for the Bumiputera essentially said, "Thank you for voting for us, this will happen again in five years time if you vote for us in the 14th general election."

He added at the same time, Najib was strengthening his position for the upcoming Umno general assembly.

"The irony is after four years of rabid propaganda and racism by TV3 and Utusan Malaysia, the Merdeka survey showed that Malay support for Umno had only risen by 1.5%, from 60% to 61.5%.

"Isn't Umno worried that despite the millions of taxpayers' ringgit spent on flooding the airwaves and newspapers, their support just increased by a measly 1.5%?"

Thomas, however, pointed out that PKR and PAS must play their respective roles too.

He said they must engage and communicate with the rural Malay folks, adding that the DAP cannot do this because it will be seen as outside interference.

"Only PKR and PAS can talk to the rural Malays and be heard," said Thomas.

Ambiga, meanwhile, said she had a lot of faith in Malaysians, expressing her amazement at the reaction of many people to the controversial movie, Tanda Putera.

"What does that tell you?" she asked.

"The movie is practically being screened for free but nobody is interested in watching it."

On the economic programmes for the Bumiputera, she said although not many Malays have come out to oppose the prime minister on this, at the same time, there were not many who supported him.

Wan Saiful pointed out that Najib's Bumiputera Economic Empowerment agenda has clearly created two classes of citizens in Malaysia.

He called for the issue to be debated in a healthy and unprovocative manner.

"In a society which claims to be democratic, it is time to explore these taboo issues. It is time not to have any more taboo issues, the Federal Constitution should be made a public document instead of being dictated to us by people with vested interests," Wan Saiful said.

Thomas said genuine democracy has never existed in Malaysia, only a make-believe form of democracy. He said the Federal Constitution was what the judges said it was, and the courts have not consistently protected it either.

He described constitutionalism as being in a comatose state in Malaysia, citing the Perak constitutional crisis in 2009, the conversion cases, Ambiga's unsuccessful petition to be allowed entry into Sarawak and other cases.

"There is no reason to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Malaysia's formation," he lamented.

Azmi said under the Federal Constitution, it was clearly stated that Malaysia would be secular, it would be equal and would not be governed by any race-based policies.

"Unfortunately, the children of our heroes from the days of independence don't have the same vision. Where is there a law in the world that says people can be treated unequally?" Azmi questioned, adding equality was a deep instinctive desire everyone has as human beings, because it means being treated with dignity. - September 16, 2013.

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