

Fight graft in your own backyard first, Transparency Malaysia tells Najib, as Umno goes to polls

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As Umno divisions nationwide go to the polls today, Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) has called on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to prove his seriousness in fighting corruption by taking action against money politics within the party.

"Najib has spoken repeatedly about clamping down on corruption in Malaysia, this is the best place for him to start, his own backyard. The time for talking is over, it is time for Najib to walk the walk," said TI-M president Datuk Akhbar Satar (pic).

He was referring to remarks by Kelantan Umno state liaison chief, Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed, who was quoted by Malay daily Sinar Harian as saying that money politics still exists in this year's Umno elections.

"This is a serious matter and should not be taken lightly, especially when it is coming from a senior cabinet minister," said Akhbar.

He said as an organisation claiming to champion Islam in Malaysia, Umno members should cast their votes based on their conscience and not based on how much they are paid.

"They should evaluate the candidates' ability to lead the country, and not who has the deepest pockets," Akhbar said in a statement today.

He said Umno's supreme council should stop pretending that money politics is an internal issue which can be dealt with by the party's disciplinary committee. Saying money politics has become the norm in Umno, Akhbar however claimed party leaders were living in fantasy by denying the existence of such a practice.

"Our point of contention is this, if money politics is acceptable, then why is it not done in the open? Why should the disciplinary committee even bother to investigate cases involving money politics if it is not wrong to splash money around in return for votes?" he asked.

He urged the Umno supreme council to take a strong stand by ensuring money politics does not play any role in the party's elections, as well as by expelling those found guilty of money politics.

"If the party supreme council does not crack down on money politics, such practices will continue to be perpetrated by individuals who will eventually move on to hold plum government positions. Corruption will then become the rule of the game.

"The knock-on effect will be disastrous for Malaysia as corrupt politicians who run the country will close an eye to the wastage and leakages revealed recently in the 2012 Auditor General's Report. Their subordinates will take the cue from their superiors and continue the practice of wastage and embezzlement," said Akhbar.

He warned that by tolerating money politics, only the rich and the elite could be voted in at the party's top posts.

Akhbar also reminded the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) not to shirk its responsibility by claiming it cannot prosecute those who are either "stupid" or "generous" enough to give money or other sweeteners in return for votes.

"If the MACC is serious about cracking down on graft, it should keep a close watch on the upcoming Umno elections. Cases such as those mentioned by Mustapa should be investigated thoroughly and the wrong-doers brought to justice." - October 12, 2013.

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