

## **Opposition decodes intent behind free decoders**

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### **It's GE14 bait and it's a waste of public funds, say three Pakatan leaders.**

PETALING JAYA: Pakatan Harapan leaders are crying foul over Prime Minister Najib Razak's announcement last Tuesday that the government will be giving free digital television decoders to 4.2 million BR1M recipients in phases.

Amanah deputy president Salahuddin Ayub, PKR vice-president Tian Chua and Amanah strategy director Dzulkefly Ahmad accused Putrajaya of wasting public funds to further Barisan Nasional's political interest.

They said it was Najib's way of fishing for votes in the 14th general election.

The decoders, worth RM199 each, will provide access to nine terrestrial TV stations – TV1, TV2, TVi, TV AlHijrah, TV3, NTV7, 8TV, TV9 and Bernama News Channel – as well as four RTM radio stations. The last phase of distribution will occur at the end of next year.

Najib said the government's aim was to move the nation into the digital era.

Salahuddin released a media statement saying Putrajaya's sense of priorities was warped.

"Taxpayer money ought to be channelled towards solving the people's core problems," he said. "If the country is able to provide good job opportunities with suitable wages, then other needs will be taken care of without the government having to buy decoders for everyone.

"Najib needs to realise that what the youth want are affordable housing and job opportunities with suitable wages as well as for the GST to be abolished, for the prices of goods to be controlled and for their higher education scholarships to not be blocked."

Tian Chua, speaking to FMT, questioned the relevance of giving the decoders to BR1M recipients.

"The argument about giving BR1M has always been about elevating the recipients from poverty and shortage of income," he said.

“Now the government is suddenly talking about TV decoders. The government needs this for its propaganda rather than to help people in need of financial assistance. It’s obvious then that the general election is closing in.”

He said the gesture was a blatant attempt to win votes. It showed BN had only its own needs in mind, not the needs of the people, he added.

“Again and again,” he said, “BN has proven that it is making policies purely for the needs of those in power. It’s using public money to support this venture, and it is a complete waste.”

Dzulkefly asked why BN was willing to spend more than RM800 million of taxpayer money “just to spread its propaganda” when it already had a “monopoly” on broadcasting stations.

“I think that when satellite TV emerged, BN must have felt challenged,” he told FMT.

He said he saw no need for BN to feel challenged because “these satellite TVs never worked in the opposition’s interests anyway.”

“I think it’s just a matter of BN’s think tanks or strategists thinking that they would like to have a bigger share of airtime.”

He described that move as “wasteful at best and scandalous at worst”.

“We are already on an uneven playing field. Now, with this move, not only is the playing field tilted, it’s completely toppled.”

Putrajaya’s free decoders are reminiscent of the Mexican government’s initiative to give away 10 million free digital television sets in 2015 just before the country’s midterm elections.

Like Najib, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto described the move as the way to bring all Mexicans into the digital age.

In Tamil Nadu in 2006, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party swept the state polls after announcing a series of giveaways such as free television sets and a drastic cut in the price of rice.

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