

Press Release from BERSIH 25 February 2023

TIME FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION TO NEGOTIATE A LAW TO PROVIDE EQUITABLE CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENTS FUND (CDF)

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) notes with regret that there was no mention of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) being allocated to opposition MPs in PM Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim's maiden Budget speech yesterday. The promise of equal CDF is also part of Pakatan Harapan's (PH) manifesto. It is regretful that the PM missed an opportunity to demonstrate his reformist credentials and what Malaysia Madani should look like. The Government and the Opposition should sit down to negotiate a law that would ensure equitable CDF.

Perikatan Nasional (PN) with 74 MPs represents 4,666,529 voters or 30 percent of those who voted in GE15. Withholding CDF is to disrespect their choice and right to vote for their preferred representative. CDF are needed by MPs to better serve their constituents and plug any local development needs not covered by state or federal programmes. It also includes a portion for the running of the constituency service centres.

Based on what is given to the 148 MPs aligned with the Unity Government, RM1.3 million annually each, it would have cost an additional RM96.2 million or only 0.024 percent of the RM386 billion budget. This is a paltry amount in comparison to the massive goodwill it would have generated.

CDF have long been used by successive governments as a political tool to punish the Opposition and "starve" them of needed funds with the hope of causing discontent among constituents towards Opposition representatives. Funds for opposition-held constituencies are instead channeled to unelected coordinators from government parties (who are normally tentative candidates in the next election) to win support. Such tactic is then used to induce defections of Opposition representatives and realignment of parties, as we have seen from the fall of BN after May 9, 2018 till the signing of MOU between the Ismail Sabri government and PH on September 13, 2021, and sadly, still on-going in Sabah. If anyone sincerely despises Sheraton Move, they should despise CDF discrimination against the Opposition too, not crying foul when they are victim but doing the same thing when in power.

Read the brief report on FMT... <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/02/25/uphold-your-promise-of-equal-funds-for-mps-bersih-tells-anwar/>

Starving Opposition representatives certainly does not work all the time as PH continued to strive as Opposition and even won the 2018 election without any CDF. Likewise, it is possible for this tactic to backfire on the parties of the Unity Government in the upcoming state elections. We hope Anwar's government is wise enough to not continue such despicable, undemocratic and shortsighted practice. The promise in the 2022 PH manifesto to give all MPs equitable CDF should be honoured in the spirit of Malaysia Madani.

As most parties in this Parliament - PH, BN, GPS, Warisan on the Government side, and PN

as the Opposition - have been in the past both the victimisers and victims, it is time for a cross-party political peace deal which sets fair rules for competition between the government and opposition, that neither the government nor the opposition is undemocratically undermined. A law that explicitly spells out the annual CDF for every MP, on an equitable formula, should replace Prime Minister's discretion.

If Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim does not take the first move, Parliamentary Opposition Leader Dato' Seri Hamzah Zainuddin should prepare a private member's bill on equitable CDF - with civil society groups, academics and other stakeholders invited to give inputs - and seek a meeting between the Unity Government cabinet and his Shadow Cabinet. PN which perpetuated this undemocratic practice in March 2020-August 2021 has the equal moral obligation to prove that it is now committed to fairness.

Statement issued by: The Steering Committee of BERSIH