



Haris Ibrahim (left) and A Jayanath

KUALA LUMPUR: Two activists have warned that the B40 or Bottom 40% group will continue to be marginalised unless the government stops pushing “one size fits all” policies.

Haris Ibrahim of Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM) said although allocations for poverty

eradication projects amounted to RM88 billion from 1970 to 2010, the majority of the B40 group was still well below the poverty threshold.

“In the context of an oil and gas producing country like Malaysia, RM88 billion may not seem like a large amount, maybe about 10% of the current budget. But when you look at how many people are still poor today compared to 1970, it’s clear that it’s just a matter of political will.”

In an interview with FMT, he said allocations for poverty eradication under previous government budgets had always been siphoned off by “corrupt politicians”.

“That’s where the money has gone,” he alleged, adding that it was now an “intergenerational issue”.

Noting that the poverty line had yet to go down, he said elected representatives were in the best position to tackle the problem.

“But we shouldn’t go down the same route of coming up with ‘one size fits all’ approaches.”

Haris said many elected representatives simply “sit in their offices and give orders” when they should go to the ground to get a better understanding of the situation.

He added that the generalised policies and programmes in place to help the B40 group would not necessarily work for everyone.

“For example, the Orang Asli in Perak have different needs from the single mothers of Kota Damansara,” the lawyer-activist said.

Fellow SABM member and former civil servant A Jayanath agreed, saying MPs and state representatives including local councils should work to map out poverty in their areas.

“Look at how many children have died and how many lives are affected in People’s Housing Projects (PPRs),” Jayanath told FMT.

“We cannot allow the B40 group to continue to be marginalised, ignored and ill-treated.”

The B40 group comprises households which earn RM4,360 a month or less. The M40 or Middle

40% group is defined as households which earn RM4,360 to RM9,619 while the top T20 group comprises households who earn RM9,619 and above.

Those in the B40 group have access to cheaper housing, tax reliefs for children and medical treatment, and financial aid through programmes like Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia (BR1M). Cheaper goods are also available at government initiatives like the Kedai Rakyat 1Malaysia (KR1M).

When asked on PH's progress in addressing B40 issues so far, Haris and Jayanath said the coalition appeared focused on other areas for the time being.

However, they noted that PH had championed such issues before the May 9 polls and voiced hope that it would take concrete steps towards addressing the matter.

"Credit must go to PH," Haris said. "Many of them who were in the opposition before listened to what we civil societies brought up in the past, not like those in Barisan Nasional (BN).

"Not a single one of the BN component parties ever came to our dialogues."

Even if PH “messed up” and made mistakes in administering its agenda for the B40 group, he said, the people would understand as long as these were honest mistakes.

Jayanath meanwhile gave PH a year to “get its act together” and set the tone on its plans for the B40 group.

He also called for a clear agenda to be put forth in writing.

The PH-led federal government has announced that it will retain the BR1M and KR1M programmes introduced by the previous administration albeit with slight variations.

It also says it will introduce a new housing loan scheme to help the M40 and B40 groups to buy houses.

In addition, PH is drawing up a health insurance protection scheme to help the B40 group obtain treatment at government and private hospitals. It is slated for tabling in the next Parliament sitting in October.

Human Resources Minister M Kulasegaran meanwhile has launched a programme to assist the B40 community, with a pilot programme already underway in his parliamentary constituency of Ipoh Barat, Perak

Source : FMT