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Cracking down on corruption

ANYONE who had doubts about Umno's seriousness in getting rid of corruption, money politics and abuse of power within the party will now think again. The stern action taken against the two senior Wanita Umno leaders by the party's supreme council on Thursday was no token gesture but a firm decision made by the party leaders after investigations had been carried out and discussions have taken place at the highest party level. Former Umno Wanita treasurer Siti Zainab Abu Bakar was also relieved of her deputy minister post at the Primary Industries Ministry. Her membership in Umno, as well as that of former Umno Wanita secretary Senator Habshah Osman, was also suspended with immediate effect.

It was a clear signal to other leaders who have been involved in corrupt practices or who have abused the power given by the people and the party that their turn will come. It was a loud and clear message to them that crime and betrayal will not be condoned. The two senior Wanita leaders were not isolated cases, either. Yesterday, the Selangor Government dropped Datuk Mohd Aini Taib and S.S. Rajagopal from its executive council and this week alone an Umno strongman in Malacca, together with a former aide of the state's Menteri Besar, had been dragged to court on corruption charges. This year, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhd Taib resigned as Menteri Besar of Selangor and ceased to function as Umno vice president and supreme council member, to face charges of failing to declare foreign currencies worth RM2.4 million when leaving the Brisbane International Airport for New Zealand last December. He has since been replaced by Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, a veteran politician who is said and seen to be clean. The party has also announced earlier this year that investigations were being carried out on eight party officials in several states.

When the call to address the growth of money-politics was first made by the Umno leadership, many did not waste time nor the opportunity to politicise the issue. For most critics, it could not have been more than a token fight against a socio-political cancer that was sure to spread and destroy the foundations of the party from inside. At the last party elections, the efforts against money-politics were intensified although the net was not spread early or wide enough to catch every crooked fish in the pond. As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Umno president, said, not all who were allowed to stand for the party election were necessarily clean. Since then, the fight against corruption, money-politics and abuse of power has been stepped up. State Governments that "cheated" the people were exposed and officials who took bribes of even RM1,000 have been arrested to face the music.

That the country's largest and most influential political party is taking these measures to clean itself up of negative practices should be a good sign for the country. Sooner rather than later, this stand against corruption and abuse of power should be adopted by other parties as well - not just political entities but also non-governmental organisations, charities, schools, associations, societies, families and private sector corporations. The initiative to weed out negative elements and influences that could weaken an organisation must be commended and emulated. Instances of how corruption have destroyed business organisations and governments are many, and they happen not just in poor or developing countries although foreign reports have somehow associated big-time corruption only with Third World countries.

In an emotional plea to the party to reject money politics, Dr Mahathir had said that corruption would corrupt every stratum of the party if it was everybody does not take part in helping to check the malpractice. On Thursday, he again made the appeal for unequivocal support for the party's measures against corruption, even if these measures involve "our friends". It will take a lot of effort, tough decisions and heartaches to rid off the negative elements in any organisation, and that will be the test of every member and, by extension, every Malaysian.

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