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Barisan victory a morale booster

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SABAH voters did it again. They proved many doomsayers wrong by giving the victory to the Barisan Nasional in the Friday and Saturday polling.

Many doomsayers, including from the self-proclaimed Islamic party, Pas, had predicted the demise of BN and Umno in Sabah.

For weeks, Pas' mouthpiece put out such screaming headlines as: "Pas has a brilliant future in Sabah", "BN is expected to receive death blow", "Sabah determines the lifespan of Umno", and "Sabah a fertile ground for Pas".

Either because it was ignorant about the true nature of Sabah politics or was the victim of arrogance, Pas turned out to be both the fool and the loser.

While the BN won with a simple majority, Pas not only lost in all the six constituencies it contested, its candidates lost their deposits as well.

Although DAP did not take part in the election, it too suffered a blow when its call for the voters to reject the BN was ignored.

Its secretary-general Lim Kit Siang repeatedly called on the Sabah voters to make a special effort to vote for PBS and reject BN.

The voters also ignored the comeback attempt by the former Chief Minister Datuk Harris Salleh by rejecting all the 48 candidates of his Parti Bersekutu Sabah.

Setia, Pasok and Independent candidates suffered the same fate when they were outrightly rejected by the voters, thereby turning Sabah into a two-party state.

BN's victory this time around represents a truer reflection of the sentiments of the people. Many areas which were previously won by PBS were captured by the BN.

These included areas where the PBS candidates crossed-over to the BN within days after the results were announced.

The outcome augers well for the State if the bad habit of changing political allegiance for personal gains is discouraged. Sabah politicians, in particular those elected by the people, should show more respect for the voters and think less of the gains they can make by changing parties.

Even the BN should resist the temptation to encourage PBS Assemblymen from crossing over now that it has a comfortable majority in the State Assembly.

The party should use its victory at the polls and the six additional Assemblymen it now has the right to nominate to build its own strength in the remaining constituencies.

If the Umno-led BN accepts turncoats, it will reduce its own legitimacy as an elected Government, and will lower its ability to build voters' loyalty.

The lompat-melompat (crossing-over) politics of Sabah should be put to an end if the people's choice is to be respected. Otherwise we will be making a mockery of the electoral process.

Although Sabah politics is vastly different from that of the Peninsula States and Sarawak, BN's victory in the State is a morale booster for the coalition party in preparing for the coming general election.

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THE Deputy Education Minister must have meant well when he, on Monday, urged international publishers to establish printing plants here to

produce affordable versions of foreign academic journals, textbooks and novels for the local market.

Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said they could also publish the works of local authors and academicians for distribution here and in other Asian countries.

He said such efforts could transform Malaysia into a centre for the printing and marketing of academic, scientific and literary publications.

He said they could use Malaysia as the base for publishing and printing materials for international distribution.

But in making the call, Fong appeared to have ignored the fact that developments of the last few weeks have rendered our country least attractive as a centre for publishing and printing.

Anybody who is familiar with the publishing and printing industry would have known that legal suits and hefty claims are not exactly the things that endear publishers and printers.

Especially not when they happen as regularly as they do in our country, particularly in recent weeks, and with monetary claims unheard of anywhere else in the developing world.

The first recent mega suit was filed by businessman Mirzan Mahathir against the Malaysian printer of the Asian Wall Street Journal, Star Papyrus Printing Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Star Publications (Malaysia) Bhd.

It was over an article published by the American-owned newspaper on Jan 4. Mirzan is claiming damages amounting to RM150 million.

Star Papyrus Printing is also being sued by businessman and newspaper owner Tan Sri Vincent Tan Chee Yioun for RM200 million in connection with an article published in the Asian Wall Street Journal on Dec 21, last year.

Tan's newspaper, The Sun, is in turn being sued by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for RM100 million for publishing an article based on a Press conference by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The DAP secretary-general joined the fray by filing a RM250-million suit against Utusan Melayu Malaysia Berhad for publishing in the Utusan Malaysia newspaper an article in which it quoted the Ex-servicemen's Association as saying that Lim Kit Siang was not patriotic.

The opposition supremo then sued the New Straits Times and New Sunday Times for RM250 million each for two cartoons they published on Feb 19 and Feb 21 respectively, which he claimed defamed him.

These and other mega suits have not only firmly established our society as a litigious society but one that seeks to use the legal means for financial gains rather than to restore "tarnished" image.

At this juncture, it is advisable for the media to be mindful when reporting or commenting on people who are filing these mega suits or their activities.

If it could happen to the Utusan, The Star, The Sun, New Straits Times, New Sunday Times and Asian Wall Street Journal, it could happen to others.  
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WHILE the advocates of Internet argue that it makes access to and control of information more equitable, what they dare not speak out is the fact that the new communication mode has bred irresponsibility on a global scale.

The lack of control of the Internet and the legal framework that favours unbridled freedom have, in recent months, caused the degeneration of the service.

Rumour-mongering, which is not exactly a feature of Western society, is beginning to be a problem.

Instead of making society more open and responsible, the Internet has

given birth to a breed of users who absolve themselves of any kind of responsibility and transparency.

A society once known for openness and willingness to take responsibility is today grappling with Internet users who seek to hide behind anonymity.

Yet when the Malaysian rumour-mongers were flooding the Internet with lies and half-truths in the name of Reformasi, many in the West celebrated it as a healthy development.

The decision of the Government to bring people suspected of spreading fear through the Internet to court did not go down well with them.

But now that the same disease threatens to spread in their own society, the West begins to view Internet rumour-mongering differently.

It was reported several days ago that a Seattle-based financial education firm had become so desperate that it filed a slander suit against 10 anonymous users of a bulletin board at Yahoo! Inc.

According to the report, the firm hopes to strike a blow against the spreading of rumours on the Internet.

The Federal Court suit names 10 "John Does" as defendants and a lawyer for Seattle-based Wade Cook Financial Corp said it might subpoena Yahoo!, a popular gateway to the Internet, to hand over the real names of the users. Yahoo! is not a target of the lawsuit.

The lawsuit comes as debate grows over Internet privacy, with users fretting about how to protect their identities from prying eyes and companies complaining about the ease with which rumours are spread over the global computer network.

"These John Does are using the anonymity afforded by the Internet to damage the reputation and undermine the business of a legitimate company," said Wade Cook attorney Paul Anderson.

"What makes this `virtual attack' even more egregious is the fact that these falsehoods are posted on Yahoo! message boards for millions of people to read and they cannot be removed from the Internet by the company," he said.

We in Malaysia should learn from this and other lawsuits as a guide in our continuing endeavour to make the Internet a useful tool of communication.

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