

24/01/1999

New social contract may be the key

A. Kadir Jasin

ONE refreshing piece of news to come out of Sabah concerning the forthcoming State election is the promise that new faces are being proposed as Umno candidates.

State Umno liaison chief Datuk Osu Sukam said in Tawau on Thursday the list of potential candidates had been forwarded to party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The need for victory aside, the rejuvenation of the party at the election should be a key consideration. Winning the election alone is not enough.

As the events of the last one-and-a-half years have shown, Umno needs not only unity and the continued support of the people but more so it needs credible leadership and effective policies.

Commencing with Sabah election, Umno has to take a hard look at itself and make some hard choices in order to continue to remain in power and to act as the fulcrum of national politics.

It has to acknowledge the negative effects of these events. It has to work hard to regroup and reunite.

Serious thoughts have to be given to the choice of leaders and the way they are treated in the party and Government. The party should no longer allow itself to be influenced by the power of personality.

There is nothing wrong of course in acknowledging or in being emotionally attached to leaders who have proven the highest quality of leadership - the way Malaysians have come to love their present and past Prime Ministers for instance.

The late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra was loved for his humility and princely demeanour, Tun Abdul Razak for his unflinching quest for development, Tun Hussein Onn for his penchant for the rule of law and Dr Mahathir for his vision and guts.

The party has gone through enough crises to suggest that it must stop all tendencies to create political demagogues and heroes out of unproven leaders simply because they are good at oratory or at projecting unblemished image.

Lost somewhere in the need to speed up development and to promote racial harmony in the aftermath of the May 13, 1969 race riots is the true collective leadership which was once the hallmark of the party.

Although Umno continues to gain membership and strength, the practice of collective leadership has somewhat been compromised. This is worsened in the last one decade by the excessive use of money and influence to gain party position.

The answer may lie in Umno and the Government returning to the 1982 promise of "bersih, cekap dan amanah" but this time around to make it happen.

For this to happen, Umno needs leaders who are clean, efficient and trustworthy. The situation may have changed from the time the slogan was introduced for Dr Mahathir's first general election as Prime Minister in 1982. But clean, efficient and trustworthy leadership is timeless.