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Armchair critics who are not prepared to help the party

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THE Malaysian evening weather of late is becoming as predictable as reactions to political decisions.

First, the sky becomes downcast and rumblings can be heard on the horizon followed by lightning and thunder. Before long comes the shower, subsidising after a couple of hours. The calm then, can be truly blissful.

Similarly, when Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad decided that candidates for the coming party election refrain from campaigning and vowed to expose those caught doing so to all and sundry.

On Wednesday, one day after he announced the decision, rumblings, describing the move as being undemocratic, could be heard in the distance.

It became louder as the days progressed and before long, flashes of dissent could be heard all over the place. Then came the showers of emotional outbursts usually flooding the Internet.

While the weather, predictable or otherwise, is of divinity and nature making it beyond human comprehension, the reaction to political decisions are not.

If anything, such a reaction need not be predictable as humanity has a choice, especially for those who are members of Umno.

However, the reaction is sometimes equally beyond comprehension.

For example, those who criticise the decision not to allow candidates for vice-presidencies, Wanita chief and deputy Umno Youth chief posts, to campaign should first reflect how the ruling came into force.

Before anyone decides to jump on the bandwagon to criticise the decision, they should understand that it was the candidates who had proposed the idea.

Of course cynics will dispute this fact, saying that the candidates did not voluntarily surrender their signatures for the pledge but the fact remains -the signatures of the candidates are on the pledge. That established, the next question that arises is who are the people making criticisms of the decision, calling it undemocratic and not within the norms of a healthy and vibrant political party.

If they are Umno members who are not candidates, it can be read as their concern that the party may suffer more setbacks from such decisions.

That being the case, it is obvious that they have a choice - either to use existing party channels to voice their displeasure over such matters or give up on the party.

Lamented an Umno member of how a member of Pas had made snide remarks to him over the decision which was described as undemocratic:

"He said to me that Pas is around to accommodate disgruntled Umno members."

The Umno man has a right to feel upset but he should also realise that most of the criticisms about Umno being undemocratic are not from within but from outside.

Says another Umno member:

"Why should we worry about what the other parties think of us? What is important is that our leaders are serious about not allowing corrupt practices in our party, reducing politicking and concentrating on building the country and party.

"If we want to listen to those from the other parties, tell them to look at themselves and their leaders first.

"Their leaders not only ensure they remain at the top for donkey's years

but had not done anything for the nation other than being good at criticising us."

He further argued about the advice that there be no-contest for the Umno presidency and deputy presidency by the Umno supreme council which led to numerous criticisms over its democratic values.

"We have seen how another political party, through its own central committee, decided to allow its secretary-general to take over the chairmanship just like that.

"This is not criticised but when we do it, through a process of consultation and consensus, outsiders make it a point to raise the issue of democracy.

"If it came from our members, it is one thing but it usually comes from those who are non-party members and that, I cannot accept."

While the criticisms from other political party members are only expected in the battle of political one-upmanship, Umno members also have to deal with the middle-class Malays who seem very concerned about democracy in Umno but are not yet prepared to "dirty" their hands to improve the situation.

These are armchair critics who live in the comfort of their material acquisitions and world views and that's about it.

But what is funny is that they are the same ones who go around urging the Malay populace to discard Umno and describe it as a sinking ship which is of no use to the community.

It is quite baffling that suddenly they become interested in the goings-on in Umno after they openly said that they do not find it appealing nor suitable for their middle-class existence.

It is equally mind-boggling that some choose to criticise the decision not to allow campaigning among those vying for top Umno posts when everyone had decided on how dirty and corrupt some candidates could be in pursuing a post.

If these views were to be accepted, then the decision should be hailed instead of criticised - it is a drastic measure to deal with a drastic situation.

Yet, at the same time, while Umno leaders and members feel that outsiders should not be too much at liberty to criticise the party demeanour, they cannot discard the realities that Umno has stopped being exclusively theirs.

It is a fact that Umno, being the leading party in the Barisan Nasional, becomes the leading force in the Government. Its president and deputy president, by convention, become the Prime Minister and his deputy which, in effect, makes it a property of all Malaysians.

Of course, there is a need sometimes, to separate party politics and government policies, but rightly or otherwise, Umno has combined both to almost become a singular entity.

In that sense, these rumblings and flashes of criticisms over political decisions made by the Umno leadership will continue, regardless of what they may be.

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