

03/08/2000

Bowing to the winds of change in politics

Harun Hashim

IT is an encouraging sign of the times when politicians take stock of the current situation and bow to the winds of change with an eye to the future. All over the world rapid changes are taking place. As we enter the era of globalisation, IT and the k-economy, we too must change with the times or be left isolated.

These past few weeks saw much heat when it was proposed that Umno abolish the three elected positions of vice president in the party.

The purported reasons for the abolition were that it will curb money politics and discourage the culture of personality cults and factionalism within the party.

The abolition proposal is a rather typical Malay reaction of burning the mosquito net because of the presence of a single mosquito!

It is true that gaining senior positions in the party hierarchy is the ticket to high public office like that of Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister or Minister but such appointments are acknowledgements of political party leadership in a parliamentary democracy.

What had been overlooked during the debate was the fact that persons elected to be office bearers of a political party are expected to lead that party, whether or not it is in the Government.

When the party is in power it has the ability to implement its declared agenda. What this means is that it is the party that tells the Government what to do and not the other way round.

The reason for this is simple. All measures undertaken by the Government must have the support of the party and the ability to carry public support as well.

It is essential, therefore, that party leaders have the ability to formulate policies which benefit the people and the country to win future elections.

The existing Umno hierarchy should accordingly be retained. For added emphasis of their importance within the party, the three vice-presidents should be designated vice-president for political affairs, vice-president for economic affairs and vice-president for social affairs, and each be given the task of coordinating the bureaus within their respective portfolios. There is really much party work for them to do.

Sabah introduced a system of a two-year rotation in the office of the Chief Minister between the Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and the Chinese to accommodate the ethnic groups in the State.

Last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed, on a visit to Sabah, said it was up to the people of Sabah to decide whether they wanted the rotation system to continue.

In Japan, with two-year terms of Prime Minister most of the time, the country is effectively governed by the civil service bureaucracy.

Past Chief Ministers under the rotation system have lapsed into political oblivion which is a great loss of political leadership in the State.

A solution is to invite the retiring Chief Minister to join the Federal Government but as time goes by, they may exceed the quota reserved for Sabah.

The better solution is to make a former Chief Minister a deputy Chief Minister, representing his community in a sort of troika with the Chief Minister and the two deputy Chief Ministers representing their respective

communities.

As in Japan, the rotation system is not a demotion for past Chief Ministers but a reality of Sabah politics.

The present Finance Minister of Japan is a former Prime Minister.

A two-year term is thus too short a period for a Chief Minister to plan and execute his vision for the State.

In the other States, Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers have held office for up to four terms which is perhaps too long a period. Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers should be limited to two consecutive terms.

In Sabah's case a two-year term is definitely too short but in the spirit of the rotation concept it should be limited to a single five-year term and rotated between the three communities after each legislative term.

In the aftermath of the Al-Ma'unah incident in Perak recently, politicians have embarked on an onslaught to rid the country of Islamic deviationists.

The public can assist the authorities if they are told who the deviationists are, and in what way their teachings are contrary to Islam.

Deviationist teachings also take the form of the written word.

Islamic religious authorities should require that all Islamic literature including the Quran, bear the stamp of approval of the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia and make it a national offence to offer for sale, any unapproved publication.

This requirement will go a long way to stamp out deviationist teachings.

For better or for worse, the changes made by politicians affect our daily lives. May wisdom prevail when changes are made.

(END)