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Christmas, Hari Raya, New Year... new Cabinet?

Shamsul Akmar

WITH the year coming to an end and the citizenry looking forward to the festivities offered by the Hari Raya and Christmas, some thoughts should also be given to what a new year promises.

For some, it is the time to look forward to the possibilities of starting afresh and getting back on track after having meandered.

To others, a new year means another attempt to start something different or put their heart to pursuing what they had been planning all this while but never had the discipline or means to do so.

At the same time, it is also a good time to spare a thought for those whose term of service has ended or retirement has arrived, while those going through it will now have a lot of time to reflect on how well they have played their role, their contributions and also "misdeeds", if any.

Coming to mind almost immediately here is the end of the service of two prominent individuals, Chief Justice Tun Mohamed Eusoff Chin and Attorney-General Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah.

Eusoff retired yesterday while Mohtar is due to end his tenure on December 31.

Appointed in place of Eusoff is Tan Sri Mohd Dzaidin Abdullah while Datuk Ainum Mohd Saaid will take over from Mohtar.

Suffice to say, there is much hope that the new appointments to these top posts in the nation's judiciary and legal service will help change some of the negative perceptions the public may have formed.

Meanwhile, there is also much talk that the Cabinet is to undergo a major re-shuffle.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is the man with the prerogative to make the changes come true or otherwise, has denied that it is going to be a major one.

He has dismissed such talk, saying that there is not going to be any reshuffle except for the possibility of some changes involving the inclusion of new faces, and the appointment of parliamentary secretaries.

Much as the man himself has dismissed such speculation, the political grapevine is still tingling strongly of an "imminent" re-shuffle.

This again is not something surprising given the fact that Dr Mahathir has been known, from time to time, to throw the red herring.

That established, it is also a fact that the people who have been spreading these rumours would claim that they got their information from "very reliable" sources, which usually range from the Prime Minister himself to those deemed close to him.

Apart from that, they are usually able to "spin a tale" convincingly by stringing related developments together to justify their theories.

One example is the widespread talk about Umno executive secretary Tengku Adnan Mansor being made a minister with a new portfolio, the Federal Territory Ministry.

First, the constitutional amendment to turn Putrajaya into a Federal Territory, followed with Tengku Adnan being made a senator.

"All these fall into place... Tengku Adnan will now be the Federal Territory Minister," said an Umno insider confidently.

However, the question that arises is whether Tengku Adnan is cut or suitable to be a minister?

Similarly, there is speculation that Umno vice-president and former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhd Taib will be made a senator

and appointed to the Cabinet.

Such ideas could well be planted by supporters hoping that they become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

No doubt, the justification is that Muhammad being the Umno vice-president should be made a Cabinet Minister but whether his appointment would help improve the image of the Government is a different matter.

Then there is also speculation that Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin is going to pursue his "on-going" request that he be allowed to vacate his post.

Again, talk of Daim requesting to "retire" from the Cabinet is not something new and it is also not new that the man's requests had not been "entertained" by the Prime Minister.

Speculation on Cabinet re-shuffles is also not confined to who's coming in, to be dropped or to be moved. It is also about who these new people are aligned with.

Prior to the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, everytime a Cabinet reshuffle occurs, the political circle would start identifying whether the new faces or those dropped were Dr Mahathir's or Anwar's "boys".

Then, even the appointments to top posts in the Government and judiciary, especially positions considered politically sensitive - the Anti-Corruption Agency, the police or the Attorney-General's Chambers, among them - were not spared of the game.

The process of linking certain individuals to certain political masters, be it perceived or real, reflected the political divide then.

But that was then.

Now, given the fact that Anwar is no longer in the Government or the party, the question of whose man will be appointed or dropped should not arise anymore.

That is however not to be. The grapevine is still abuzz with stories and theories with regards to some of the anticipated appointments to a new Cabinet. Some of these individuals are being linked to Anwar and there is talk that a group within the Government, specifically within the party, is trying to push Dr Mahathir into retirement.

While rumours are rumours and speculation remains a speculation until it is proven to be true, the widespread interest in a possible Cabinet reshuffle should not be perceived too negatively.

In many instances, it reflects the citizenry's concern over the existence of "passengers" in the Cabinet or those who only serve to negate the good efforts of others.

Collective responsibility is one thing, but the need to weed out non-performers and those who lack scruples should be continuously pursued, although rejuvenation of the Cabinet through reshuffles will fail if the new ones are equally suspect.

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