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Delegates should choose leaders who can defend party

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A WANITA Umno observer walking through the hall of the Putra World Trade Centre seemed disturbed because of the overcrowding unlike in previous assemblies.

"The last time I saw such a big crowd was when I went for the haj (pilgrimage)," she said.

It is an exaggeration but the fact remains - the turnout this time around is exceptionally high.

Year in and year out, every Umno assembly is a must for delegates from all over the country.

It is still about faith - the belief that such meetings will rejuvenate and re-affirm the faith they have in Umno's struggles and direction.

However, there are the renegades who, year in and year out too, make the trip not hoping for the revitalisation of faith but for their own personal ends - to be exact, for cash or in kind.

These scums of Umno are the people who actually cheapen the whole process and it is not surprising for the top leadership, especially the president himself Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, to repeatedly express his disgust over such matters.

If only all in Umno would realise how much faith the Malay community has placed in them in their hope for the betterment of their lot since the day the party was realised!

In the days past, when the party was still holding its convention in humble abodes, the congregation sought inner strength to pursue independence.

In essence, the trips to the assemblies can be divided into three main areas - the fight for independence, the pursuit of the National Economic Policy and now, modernity and confidence.

The two earlier eras were quite clear-cut - first the battle was against the colonial masters and the second of having a blueprint for the Malay agenda.

It is the present era that things can be so ambiguous, so much so that the path for the party becomes unclear especially in getting its sense of direction.

The battle for the post of Wanita chief is a clear example of how much derailed, party members and even leaders can be.

Even before the Wanita delegates converged at the assembly hall to vote, trivial issues cropped up like incumbent head Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman wearing the tudung should be given the votes and not her challenger Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz whose head is not covered.

The perception is that Siti Zaharah started covering her head during the run up to the election and Rafidah has refused to do so as a matter of principle.

If it is true that Siti Zaharah wore the tudung to secure votes, it means she knew what the mood among the delegates was and as a leader, she was sensitive to their demand.

This, however, does not make Siti Zaharah's action palatable as she is then playing to the gallery and using religion for her political ends and that is what Umno has always accused Pas of doing.

The other downside of such actions is that it means that the delegates are voting based on a very flippant and trivial consideration.

Such fragility of thought among the Wanita members is not confined to

the movement but has also spread to the other parts of Umno.

Today, as the delegates converge to elect the three vice-presidents and 25 supreme council members, fear of them also being swayed by material and flippant considerations is very real.

As it is, delegates have started rating the chances of the nine vice-presidential candidates and acronyms like NGO has been coined to reflect their preference.

This NGO has nothing to do with that of the non-governmental organisations which fight for issues from environment to child abuse but rather the initials of three leaders - Najib, Ghani and Osu.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman are understandably rated to be the front-runners as they secured the highest number of nominations.

However, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Osu Sukam being included as one of the front-runners, carries a much more underlying political consideration.

The simple understanding to Osu being included in the top rankings is that he comes from Sabah and if he won the high post, it meant he is the first leader from Sabah to come closest to national leadership.

The question which delegates will have to answer is whether Osu has the qualities and is made of the material required to be considered for this role.

At the same time, the other six candidates - Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Negri Sembilan Mentri Besar Tan Sri Isa Samad, Selangor Mentri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar and former Selangor Mentri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib are no pushovers.

For that matter, the acronyms for the ratings can change from NGO to NGA, to MGM to MGS and even MGR.

But delegates will have to consider one very important thing and that is the leaders they choose will not be excess baggage to the party as they are supposed to defend Umno and not the other way round.

The bottom line - the journey taken by the delegates this time around should make them clear on the direction they must take.

And it's not about money.

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