

14/05/2000

Eradicate scourge of money politics

A. Kadir Jasin

MONEY politics and democracy do not mix. That's what we have been told for many years now. The majority of the people agree. Even those practising money politics, be they the givers or takers, would agree.

We are also told that democracy is not perfect. Like all other products of human minds, it is flawed. Money politics makes it worse.

But we are told that democracy is still the best way to govern. We believe it because we have been practising it for more than four decades with considerable success.

These points were again repeated by Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his opening address to the party's 54th general assembly in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday.

We are even more convinced when, a few days before the big day, Dr Mahathir openly admitted that money politics was still being practised although it was not very apparent. And when the results of the Umno supreme council election was announced on Thursday night, with some surprises and upsets, voices were heard that some of the winners were involved in the practice.

There were, the voices said, those who dabbled in money politics but did not win. An angry delegate from Selangor said wryly: "When the president condemned money politics, they cheered him. And when a candidate who practised money politics was announced a winner, they also cheered."

Another said: "The president talked about going back to basics, about revitalising the party's ideals. Look at those gleaming RM1 million-over Mercedes S-Class."

At that instance, how I wished they would stop complaining in the hallway and instead report the corrupt persons to the party's disciplinary committee.

After all, just days before the assembly, Dr Mahathir had said those found guilty of money politics would be disqualified even if they won.

It is refreshing to hear Dr Mahathir calling on party members to return to the ideals upon which Umno was founded 54 years ago.

Being a pragmatist, the Prime Minister does not all the time subscribe to idealism. But in many things, Dr Mahathir is driven by idealism. Perhaps we can describe him as a pragmatic idealist. He is liberal, but not in the western sense.

The revival of Umno's ideals does not look promising if the infectious money politics is not checked soon and the party's democratic ideals are allowed to be eroded by this scourge.

Umno's ideals are not big cars, RM50,000 a piece diamond-studded wristwatches and five-star hotel rooms.

Umno's ideals are independence, freedom, unity and muafakat (consensus). But over the years, as Umno became bigger and the Malays wealthier, idealism gave way to power and selfishness because power can be easily translated into money and wealth.

Dr Mahathir's idealism in wanting to build Melayu Baru and Bangsa Malaysia will remain an unfulfilled struggle if Umno does not return to its founding principles, starting with the eradication of money politics.