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Not really a binding party tradition

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DISRAELI once said, "With words we govern men."

Some politicians and even one or two political parties are in cloud-cuckoo-land or dream world, an area of unrealistic expectations and rather foolish behaviour.

Whether they like it or not, one or two are destined to rendezvous with disappointment and despair.

Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz had suggested that Umno do away with vice-presidents - that it is more than sufficient to have only a deputy president. When the deputy president moves up the ladder, it should not be mandatory that the prime minister must choose one of the vice-presidents as his deputy. It could come from any one of the Supreme Council members.

I think the present Umno constitution is good and should be maintained.

In 1970, Tun Razak did not choose any of the three vice-presidents - Encik Ghafar Baba, Tan Sri Sardon Zubir and Encik Khir Johari. Instead, he made Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman deputy prime minister although he was only a member of the Supreme Council.

A vice-president of Umno need not end up being deputy prime minister. Tun Razak had created a precedent.

Tun Razak's first choice was Khir Johari. However, he was persuaded by his advisers to choose Tun Dr Ismail because he was considered a more appropriate candidate - a year after the May 13 1969 race riots.

Tun Dr Ismail had rejoined the government to help deal with the trouble. He did an excellent job.

There never was a tradition that a vice-president must succeed the deputy president. Indeed, only two out of 24 had become prime minister and six deputy prime minister and deputy president. The rest just fade away such as Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, the former Menteri Besar of Trengganu and Datuk Harun Idris, the former Menteri Besar of Selangor.

Umno was formed in May 1946 to oppose the British-imposed Malayan Union which made protectorate Malay states British Crown colonies. Umno succeeded in its agitation and as a result, the Federation of Malaya became the successor of the much-hated Malayan Union in 1948.

The British Government's fatal mistake was to force the Malayan Union on the Malays. The generally pro-British Malays at once became disenchanted with the British. And Umno started campaigning for early independence. The more radical Malays even wanted Malaya to become a part of the emerging Republic of Indonesia. The British, the Malays concluded, deluded them. The blunders of the British Military Administration did not help either.

As John Cloake wrote in his book "Templar - Tiger of Malaya", "The Malayan Union was a blunder", and "a new constitution cooked up in Whitehall", without consultation and "without any but a cynically superficial concern for the position of the rulers."

The contest for vice-presidents was and is unbelievably expensive and intense as if it was a do-or-die battle, simply because winners believe the position is an open door to the coveted posts of deputy prime minister and prime minister which is strictly not true. For sure, the winners have definite advantage.

Umno never had the post of a vice-president until 1949 and the first holder of was a British-trained barrister, Datuk Panglima Bukit Gantang Haji Abdul Wahab, the British-appointed Menteri Besar of Perak.

In March 1976, Datuk Hussein Onn, the new prime minister (he succeeded

Tun Razak who had suddenly died of leukaemia in January in London) wanted to appoint an extremely unpopular man, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, as his deputy. Datuk Hussein had to back down following strong pressures from the three vice-presidents of Umno - Encik Ghafar Baba, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Dr Mahathir Mohamad and other latent influential people including those in the civil service and the police which was under Ghazali. He was the minister of Home Affairs and a member of the Umno Supreme Council.

During the last Umno election, nine persons contested for the three vice-presidential posts. I shall, however, only write about the six losers.

Datuk Abdul Ghani Osman, the Menteri Besar of Johore, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's successor, fared badly because he trusted and allied himself with the wrong people. Besides Ghani, to many people, is cold and distant.

Datuk Syed Hamid Albar. The majority of Umno members told me they were and are still wondering why he was running in view that Johor had two other candidates, Ghani and Muhyiddin. Albar has good credentials, however, in the company of the other two, he did not make it.

Muhyiddin won against all odds as did Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, an incumbent without a government position.

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, was from the start, a sure winner, and polled impressively.

Datuk Dr Rais Yatim, though articulate in English as well as Bahasa, failed in his fourth attempt. His home base (Negeri Sembilan) was and is latently divided and fractious. He has a sharp mind which sometimes is a disadvantage in a super-sensitive society and environment.

Tan Sri Mohd Isa Samad lacks charisma though he has a big war chest. He has governed Negeri Sembilan, according to some people, rather well.

Datuk Sri Panglima Osu Sukam, the Chief Minister of Sabah, would have been the first vice-president from the new territory of Sabah had his "allies" delivered their part of the bargain. In any event, he performed very well for a first timer.

Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar, the Menteri Besar of Selangor, even to his own supporters, is considered one of the dullest senior Umno politicians. Though Selangor packs political clout, he failed to make a good impression.

As I write this, my memory raced back to those early days of the Malayan Union, the British Military Administration and the arrival of the British bully, Sir Harold MacMichael, the architect of Malayan Union. But according to the Ministry of Education Textbook Bureau, Sir Edward Gent, was the architect. Gent was the first and last governor of the Malayan Union. The gross mistake occurred before Tan Sri Musa Muhamad became Minister of Education.

Though Umno membership is based on race as are MCA and MIC, it is multi-racial in its policy because it teaches tolerance towards non-Bumiputera Malaysians and adheres to the spirit of live and let live.

A vice-president of Umno need not end up being deputy prime minister or prime minister. Tun Razak had created a precedent.

The message from the people to the government is be tough against the Islamic deviants, cultists and what have you who had manipulated Islam and will do so in future to justify the Devil's work.

Forget for the time being next year's Umno divisional election. Instead, concentrate on the efforts to regain the confidence of the people, and more importantly, that of the young Malaysians.

In May 1996, Umno made a declaration that the party faced many internal and external challenges which if not handled properly, could result in declining support and erosion of its power. It occurred three years after that declaration. Make amends with haste otherwise, we may be out in the

midday sun sooner than we think.

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