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Umno faces hostile forces

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A SCHOOL teacher in Marang, Terengganu decided to inject, presumably his political views, in questions for a monthly Bahasa Malaysia composition writing test.

One of the topics was Keadilan Semakin Hilang Dan Tandus Dalam Sistem Kehakiman Di Malaysia (Justice Has Withered and Dried Up in the Malaysian Judicial System).

This is not the first time a teacher had tried to "share" his political stand or even aspirations with his or her students.

In the run up to the 1999 general election, a teacher in Kedah did the same.

Whether these teachers had a right to set such questions or otherwise, it is for the Education Ministry to decide.

It is also for parents to reflect on whether they want to allow their children to be dragged into political battles at a tender age.

Teachers at large should also do a lot of soul-searching as to whether they want to allow some black sheep tarnish the noble profession.

But for Umno, such episodes should serve as a notice to them that they are indeed operating in a "hostile environment".

This is a point which had been repeatedly raised by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of late.

Back to the Umno domain in Putra World Trade Centre on Monday. Several Umno Supreme Council members came off the Menara Datuk Onn lift looking like they were deep in thought.

However, a few others, came off, laughing and joking with one another like they had no care in the world, and waiting at the corridors were their cajolers, laughing at whatever joke that was being cracked and ever ready to carry their files.

All of them had just finished attending a four-hour council meeting chaired by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Of course, it is unfair to judge those who were laughing in "reckless abandon" as not caring about the party.

Ironically, at the same time, Dr Mahathir was still at the meeting room on the 38th floor, holding a Press conference to explain to journalists on what transpired during the meeting.

It was also during the Press conference that he decided to announce his intention of concentrating more on party affairs and not the Government, saying it was part of the transition process of the national leadership.

"He has been meeting a lot of party leaders from all levels of late. He wants to keep his promise - he inherited a solid Umno and he wants to leave it behind to his successor in similar fashion," an aide said.

In fact, the succession in Umno looks quite in place and with Dr Mahathir pushing for the transition process of the national leadership, the party should have a clear direction.

The transition will mean that Dr Mahathir wants his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi to get into the act and become well-acquainted with the sense of power and taking the lead.

After Abdullah, one of the three vice-presidents Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin should be in line to be second in command.

By convention, either one of this three will assume the deputy Prime Minister's role if Abdullah takes over from Dr Mahathir.

That is how the whole structure looks like at this stage.

In short, with succession established, the party should be able to move forward to undertake the necessary steps to regain the affection of the Malays first, then the rest of the country.

However, it is not as simple as that and the underlying factor is the compelling necessity to inculcate confidence within Umno in a new leader. The party must prevail even when someone takes over from a strong and commanding one like Dr Mahathir.

On one side, some quarters do not see Abdullah as having the same qualities as Dr Mahathir.

On the other, they do not see either Najib or Muhammad, both viewed to be ambitious and consummate politicians, as being prepared to remain as Abdullah's number two and this could lead to some complications.

Abdullah will not be spared such scrutiny. Assisting him will be Najib, Muhammad and Muhyiddin.

At the same time, the only one who seems less of a threat to Abdullah's leadership if and when he takes over is Muhyiddin.

"If Muhyiddin comes into the picture, then the RAHMAN theory will be denied," quipped an Umno member.

He was referring to the popular theory that the acronym RAHMAN, derived from the name of the first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman represents the initials of his successors.

So far, initials had been representative of the nation's leadership - R for Rahman, A for Tun Abdul Razak, H for Tun Hussein Onn, M for Dr Mahathir while A, initially thought to be for (Datuk Seri) Anwar Ibrahim has now been accepted as for Abdullah.

Then N may be for Najib and the way he has won the highest votes for the vice-presidency twice running, the RAHMAN theory should be realised, unless, Abdullah opts for somebody else if he assumed the top post.

Muhyiddin though brushing aside the RAHMAN theory as mere coincidence, however believes that there was no reason for Najib not to assume the second post.

"I personally think that there is nothing wrong for Abdullah to have Najib as the second in command as Najib had won the vice-presidency twice with the highest votes," Muhyiddin argued.

All these sounds good but there appears to be no escaping the scrutiny on some leaders - in particular the talk that some of them are Anwar's boys.

People like Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi who won quite comfortably for the Supreme Council post and Muhyiddin had continuously been bandied as an argument as to why they cannot be trusted to assume bigger responsibilities.

"But I am an Umno man and my loyalty lies with the party, hence the reason why I remained even after Anwar was sacked," - a statement Zahid had re-iterated.

Muhyiddin concurred and argues that he, and many others in Umno who supported Anwar during his days in office cannot be faulted.

"After all, Dr Mahathir told us that Anwar is going to be his successor and in effect expected us to be loyal to him and Anwar too," he explained.

Muhyiddin also pointed out that he had always supported Dr Mahathir. His track record during the height of the Team A and Team B conflict in the 1987 contest between Dr Mahathir and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah for the presidency would serve as his justification.

"I was then the Menteri Besar of Johor. (Tan Sri) Musa Hitam was then Razaleigh's running mate in Team B. All Johor leaders were expected to throw their support behind Musa and inevitably Razaleigh's Team B.

"I came out openly to announce that my support was for Dr Mahathir and

my question is - aren't some of those who today accuse me of being an Anwar supporter, were supporting Razaleigh then?"

Though much of these does not paint a rosy picture for Umno, it is actually the real strength of the party.

Umno has internal conflicts, leaders and their supporters leave only to return and later on assume important roles within the party.

Dr Mahathir went through that when he was sacked by Tunku Abdul Rahman. Abdullah chose the "wrong team" in 1987. Najib, Mat Taib and Muhyiddin had also taken wrong turns along the way and came back stronger.

That is not the point. The point is: how Umno can come back stronger is everyone's concern.

But to expect outside forces, like teachers and some civil servants, who used to be the backbone of Umno to help in these efforts will be wishful thinking.

The teacher in Marang is an obvious example. There are others lurking in the shadows and ready to pounce. When they do, it is no more a laughing matter.

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