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When bigger picture is missed and tiniest details not spared scrutiny

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A GROUP of mosque regulars in Bandar Baru Selayang were extremely pleased with themselves a few weeks ago when the concert of Senario, the popular Malay comedians-cum-singers group, was a total washout due to a downpour.

"Padan muka, kena sembahyang hajat, datang ribut terus tak jadi (Serves them right, we performed the prayers for God's intervention, the storm put a stop to the concert," bragged one of the women.

Another woman who was listening to the conversation got fed up and said:

"Why should you make such a request to God ... bukan ke itu tutup pintu rezeki orang? (Isn't that denying others of a livelihood?)"

The dissenter is a minority and the way things are going, it will continue to be so.

More of interest are the knee-jerk reactions many Malays tend to indulge in when facing a situation not to their dislike or beyond their ability to control. Under such circumstances, some tend to read too much into things and ignore the bigger picture instead.

It is similar with the way reactions were to the outcome of the race for the Umno vice-presidency.

Most of the reactions to the victory achieved by Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhd Taib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin were that of the return of the Wawasan Team.

Coined during the 1993 Umno elections, the Wawasan Team was led by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who managed to oust the then deputy-president Tun Ghafar Baba while the trio swept the vice-president posts.

Another member of the team was Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik who secured the coveted Youth Chief post.

As such, it is understandable if an analysis on the outcome of Thursday's vice-presidency race points towards that of Anwar's ghost returning to haunt the party.

Of course, a simplistic assessment will reflect such but some insights may change such perceptions.

In the first place, the Umno Kubang Pasu division had, during its meeting, nominated the three. It is significant as the division is led by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself.

This, to many other divisions, comes as a signal to the preference of the party president and delegates were only taking the cue from him.

After all, prior to this, Kubang Pasu had on numerous occasions chosen not to make any nomination for fear that it would be read by other divisions and party members as the preference of the president.

But in the run-up to this assembly, due to the ruling by the supreme council that all divisions must fully make their nominations, Kubang Pasu could not avoid this responsibility.

And the candidates they nominated for the three vice-presidents were Najib, Muhammad and Muhyiddin.

However, it was not only Kubang Pasu which had made such nominations.

Parit Buntar division chief Abdul Rahman Sulaiman was upset that the media chose not to mention his division which had also opted the trio for the vice-presidency.

The division said it believed in and observed the no-contest advice for the president and deputy-president posts.

"As such, we decided to nominate Dr Mahathir and Pak Lah (as Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is affectionately referred to).

"We discussed on whom we should nominate as the vice-presidents. I said, in pursuing the spirit of the no-contest advice, we should re-nominate the incumbents - Najib and Muhammad.

"For the third slot (which was vacated by Pak Lah who has moved up the ranks), I said why don't we nominate the other incumbents of the 1993 election, and he is Muhyiddin.

"The division committee and delegates supported the idea and today, the proposal is realised," Abdul Rahman said.

While he can enjoy the satisfaction of being the leader of a division which got it right in its choice of vice-presidents, the rest of the Umno family and observers should also realise that much water had flowed under the bridge since the 1993 Wawasan Team showing.

In fact, the Wawasan Team started crumbling within a year after they swept the party elections.

First to fall was Rahim. He was accused of sexual wrongdoings with an underaged girl.

Even though he was cleared of all allegations and later on re-instated to the Youth chief post, the scandal was a death knell to his career.

When the 1996 Umno elections were held, Rahim lost and so did another vice-president from the Wawasan Team - Muhyiddin.

Najib and Muhammad were retained.

Within a year after the elections, it was Muhammad's turn to get into trouble when he was arrested in Australia for failing to declare millions in cash he was carrying.

He was, however, acquitted by an Australian court.

Muhyiddin went to Anwar's house on the day he was sacked but Muhyiddin remained in Umno.

And then came the general elections.

Dr Mahathir, against all speculations that he was going to drop Muhyiddin as a candidate, retained him for the Pagoh seat.

And when Dr Mahathir named his Cabinet, against all expectations, he retained Muhyiddin as a minister.

Then there is the meeting between Dr Mahathir and Muhyiddin during the early stages of the divisional meetings when the latter complained that there were efforts to block nominations for him.

After the meeting between the two, nominations started pouring in for Muhyiddin.

Then there is Najib, whom everyone was sure from the beginning to make it.

On one hand, he won the 1996 vice-presidency with the highest votes.

Despite that, Dr Mahathir had chosen Abdullah, who came out second in the vice-presidency race, as the Deputy Prime Minister to replace Anwar.

Najib showed his maturity by not making any statement and even went on to pledge his support to Pak Lah and Dr Mahathir.

Against this backdrop, it is understandable for the delegates to give Najib their resounding support and to make him come out top for the second time around.

In addition, during the 1993 elections, though Najib was a member of the Wawasan Team, he was not seen as a true Anwar loyalist as his credentials did not reflect the type of people Anwar had preferred.

In politics, there are no permanent enemies nor friends.

By the way, the Senario's concert was held last week - despite prayers for another washout.

Some others might have prayed for the rain to stay away and theirs were answered.

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