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Will there be winds of change?

Abdullah Ahmad

THE stresses of changing Umno politics, which have since become so much more personal and vexed, began to appear some time ago.

Former US President Richard Nixon's downfall was caused by the Watergate affair. Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar resigned as Menteri Besar of Selangor last Thursday over an alleged sexual relationship, as was the case with Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Thamby Chik, former Malacca Chief Minister.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, once a potential Prime Minister, was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, then arrested, tried, and eventually sentenced for corruption and sodomy.

The "Abu Hassan Affair" is no longer, I am afraid, a quiet affair.

In Great Britain in the early 1960s, there was the celebrated Profumo affair.

Harold MacMillan was forced to spend a great deal of his time, as he later wrote in his memoirs, "over a silly scrape (over a woman) into which one of the ministers has got himself. It's John Profumo - Secretary of State for War. It would not matter so much if it was just an affair of morality. But unfortunately, among the frequenters of this raffish and disreputable set, which centres at Lord Astor (Bill Astor), was the Russian military attache!... I must decide what I ought to do. All this is very bad for the reputation of the party (Conservative) and of the Government".

The Prime Minister and president of Umno, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, did exactly what MacMillan did.

In the case of Dr Mahathir, a good evening's work was devoted to Abu Hassan's case and subsequently meeting, reviewing and evaluating the situation, and of the various candidates to lead and prepare Selangor Umno and Barisan Nasional for the next general election.

Politicians of considerable stature like the heads of state governments, once impacted explosively by "believable" rumours, must leave office.

I had an appointment with Abu Hassan on the day he resigned.

That day, he was also scheduled to receive a university rector, one of the sons of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, and another person, so his office told me.

I know not whether the others saw him, but I did, though his office had cancelled the appointment the moment the morning newspapers confirmed that he was no longer the CEO (chief executive officer) of Selangor Inc.

We had a good 15 to 20 minutes chat about the engrossing Selangor politics which had engulfed him, at his official residence where he has been allowed to stay until the end of September. This is a Malay courtesy and graciousness.

In the UK at least, once you resign or lose office you are evicted from the official residence straight away. You move out through the back door as the new occupant arrives via the front door.

If one reads about the transfer of power in Britain it is rather poignant, ruthless, impersonal, and very professional. Everything is so professional it leaves us in the East almost nonplussed.

Abu Hassan, after only slightly more than three years, was engulfed in the Selangor state political flames. One day, if the politicians are not careful, the Selangor seat of power will be engulfed by the rising political and moral cost unless there are winds of change in Shah Alam.

Abu Hassan's political life ended when he opted for "personal reasons"

which must be very compelling to resign, rather than take on the fight against his opponents both within and without Umno. If he had a good case, he was, I gathered, advised, and I think rightly, to tell the true story once and for all.

Instead, what he told the media has only fuelled more speculation, doubts and more breaking stories notwithstanding the appeal and supportive statements by Dr Mahathir.

Honestly, the more he or any member of his family talks, the more they are digging themselves into a deeper hole.

Politicians should realise that "public events and issues" of these days are quite beyond the control of the Government or the print media.

I have heard from reliable sources that all kinds of intrigues and "latent campaigns" are going on about who will be the next Menteri Besar of Selangor. Dr Mahathir had said he would announce his choice soon. The sooner the better, if I may suggest.

I do wish, perhaps, those who were so anxious to get Abu Hassan out will now see the disadvantages besides the advantages.

Happy days are back for Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib. I saw it coming when he won the Umno vice president post. It's amazing, isn't it? Everything is possible in politics.

Muhammad may have lost three years, but he is now on the right fast track. Umno members and leaders are being canvassed by his supporters to give their man another chance.

The unhappy stroke of fate for Abu Hassan could not have come at a better moment for Muhammad.

If what follows the "Abu Hassan Affair" causes the minimum of infighting and excitement and, alas, a corresponding injury to Umno Selangor, Muhammad will be looked upon, whether one likes it or not, as a "conciliator and facilitator".

This will, I am sure, be a relief to the Umno leadership and members.

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