

Proposal to bar rich Malays will curb money politics

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THERE is no reason for those who love Umno to reject the two proposals by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to reduce the incidence of money politics in the party.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Prime Minister, has suggested that the rich Malays not be allowed to contest for key party positions and that the division chiefs should not be given huge contracts because of their elected status.

There is little argument that money politics has seriously damaged Umno's image and there are concerns that if left unchecked, it will have a detrimental long-

term effect on the strength of the party.

In the past two decades, money politics has reared its ugly head and those aspiring for division or supreme council positions were prepared to pay huge sums to ensure success in such elections.

The emergence of such corporate figures has changed the leadership of the party at both the division and national levels. More of the rich and famous have joined the leadership ranks at the expense of the less-financially endowed members.

The grassroots leadership used to be dominated by

teachers and village heads in the early days. Nowadays, the list reads more like the Who's Who in the corporate world.

What is saddening is that many of these businessmen have little interest in the welfare of the grassroots but merely use the members from the rural areas to project them onto the national stage.

There are two reasons why the division chairman-

ship is such a plum. The main one is that the chairman will invariably be the first choice for a parliamentary or state seat.

Once they have been elected they will have the chance to join the Government at either federal or state level. A lesser prize will be a chance to be given government contracts which will put them in the millionaire class in the shortest possible time.

Another attraction of being a division leader is that he will also be a delegate to the general assembly which elects the top party leaders such as president, deputy president and the three vicepresidents as well as members of the supreme council.

Additionally, he will most probably be in control of the majority of the delegates in his division who will be attending the party's annual general meeting.

If the corporate figure should have more ringgit than support in the division, he can always overcome this handicap by handing

out cash and kind to the key members at the branch level to deliver the votes.

Obviously the victims of such money politics are the ordinary members who may not have the financial muscle to stop this practice. They will be disgusted at this blatant method of buying votes but there is little they can do about it.

All these grassroots leaders who really love the party will find the situation difficult to accept and unless the national leadership can do something to change it, these members will have little or no say at the branch and division levels.