

# Love the party gre

Nat - 3 JUN 2001.

THE following is the full interview with Tan Sri Aziz Tapa.

**Q: Tan Sri, you joined the party at the age of 23. What has kept your loyalty to Umno intact for the past 55 years?**

**A:** When we are in politics, we should love the party more than ourselves. That's the key which keeps my loyalty intact.

Attending lessons on politics were part of our education process then. Reading books on Indonesia was also part of that process.

As a result of that upbringing, we were taught that in the course of achieving the struggles of a political party, the party is important. We are not important.

That's why we have a Malay saying: "*Orang berjuang, esa hilang, kedua terbilang*".

I sought Datuk Onn Jaafar's interpretation of the saying. Datuk Onn said, "We are fighting against the Whites (the British) and if we are caught, we will be heading for gaol. That's what is meant, we will perish (*hilang*), if we survive, we will become eminent (*terbilang*) and we will be rewarded."

In other words, when we fight in a war, we will probably be vanquished, we will perish. But if we succeed, we will probably get a promotion.

In those days, the party was paramount. Our struggle was for the race, religion and country. We fought for the future of our grandchildren. We also fought to unite the Malays.

These were our famous phrases at that time. We harped on it at every gathering. At that time, the Malays were divided. Only their religion, Islam, held them together.

Parochialism was then the cause of disunity among the Malays. A football match between a team from Kelantan and Terengganu would only conclude after an exchange of blows between the players. Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad, the former Kok Lanang MP, can testify to that.

If a person from a village trespassed into another village and behaved indecently, he would be assaulted.

Acknowledgement must be given to Datuk Onn. He was outstanding in uniting the Malays. Despite various differences, Datuk Onn managed to unite them. He did a fantastic job. It wasn't easy.

He also succeeded in luring Malay women to literally come out of their shells. At that time, Malay women were restricted

to the confines of their homes and there's a saying for that: "*Anak dara tiang para* (they were confined to the kitchen), *orang bujang tahi kijang* (they were rendered useless)".

But Datuk Onn managed to get them to leave their kitchens and attend Umno rallies. That's why I consider Datuk Onn an eminent leader.

His key to success was simple. When the British wanted to implement the Malayan Union, his campaign was plain and simple. The Malays were told of the implications, of how the Malay rulers would be reduced to *kadi* (registrar of Muslim marriages and divorces) status. And the Rulers would be stripped off their authority.

It was a shock to the Malays. Allowing the Rulers to be incapacitated by the British would be a painful blow to the Malays because "*Tuaniku umpama payung yang terkembang, patik sekalian menumpang berlindung*" (literally translated, the Ruler is the guardian of the Malays).

If the authority of the Malay Rulers was removed, who would be their protector?

In the crusade against the Malayan Union, we decided to go into mourning by wearing a black armband. It was Datuk Onn's decision. It was symbolic. It was to show the people that the power of the Malay Rulers had been put to death by the British.

As a result of that, Umno flourished. In

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1952, the British Parliamentary Commission was despatched to Malaya to gauge the resistance of the Malays towards the Malayan Union.

They went to Johor, travelled to Malacca, then to Kedah and they saw for themselves the Malay antagonism to the Malayan Union. The Whites who had served in Malaya had also lent their support to the Malays.

Datuk Onn fought all the way and demanded that the Malays be allowed to defend their own nation after the Whites failed to protect them during the Japanese invasion. The British had to relent.

**Q: Is there any difference between the loyalty of Umno members today and in the past?**

**A:** Until the 1960s, when most of the Umno leaders comprised teachers who had graduated from the Tanjung Malim teachers' training college, it was obvious these teachers had a genuine struggle for the party.

But things began to change when people from the corporate sector made their presence felt in the 1970s.

That's why I authored a new proverb in 1970s to replace the earlier proverb "*Orang berjuang, esa hilang, kedua terbilang*".

I replaced it with: "*Orang berjuang, pertamanya cari menang, kemudian cari wang, kemudian jatuhkan orang, lepas itu hidup diawang-awang, jatuh terlentang*".

(Their struggle was, first, to ensure victory, then look for money, then bring other people down, live a grandiose life and then fall to the ground).

We have seen dozens of them collapse to the ground.

The crowd broke into laughter when I uttered the new proverb at the general assembly. But things didn't change ... I was still able to get free drinks. Even Ministers still invited me to free drinks every time I stepped out of my hotel for breakfast.

It gave me an impression that my new proverb wasn't good enough because the present generation, I believe, is no longer sensitive to proverbs and metaphors. They are more sensitive to money.

Today, when leaders or members meet, they no longer talk about the party or discuss how Pas is going to attack them. They only talk about projects.

When they meet in the branches or divisions, while exchanging pleasantries, deep in the heart, they are asking them-

selves, "When is the right time to topple him?"

That's why when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad appealed to members to ensure Umno returns to its original cause, I remarked to Tan Sri Wan Azmi, "*Anak rimau dah diajar makan daging, susah kita nak ajar dia makan ikan*", (it is not easy to teach a tiger cub to eat fish after being fed with meat), and Tan Sri Wan Azmi just smiled.

At the recent 55th Umno anniversary celebration, I used four words in my speech to describe how Umno could return to its original cause: *Budi bahasa* (tact and courtesy) and *tingkah laku* (behaviour and manners).

I leave it to Umno members to interpret what is *budi*, what is *bahasa*, what is *tingkah* and what is *laku*.

Get an expert or a sociologist to interpret these words. If they succeed in interpreting the words, they will get the solutions to all problems affecting the Malays.

I don't see any problem with the Malays if they have the *budi bahasa* (manners) and respectable *tingkah laku* (good behaviour).

I know it is not difficult for the Malays to cultivate these noble values. I have seen it when I served as an Assemblyman for two terms in Malacca.

Whether they were Chinese, Indians or Malays, it was not a problem to attend to their wishes.

The Chinese have their own way in handling problems but the Indians and the Malays had the same way in solving them.

The Indians and the Malays would seek the help of an Assemblyman to solve even the most minor of problems. They would come to my house just to get me to phone the Veterinary Department to attend to their cow which was having difficulty in giving birth.

Contrary to the Chinese. They would seek the help of their Assemblyman only after exhausting all avenues. They only came to me when they encountered major problems.

As an Assemblyman, I was not generous with promises. In fact, I never promised them anything.

That was my way of doing things. I would tell them that I would take up their requests with the relevant officials.

If they asked for a telephone line, I could not promise them that they would get one.

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How could I promise? I didn't have a telephone pole, neither did I have the wires.

So when you didn't promise them anything and yet they got what they wanted, you would become more meaningful to them.

Another thing, it's compulsory for an Assemblyman to attend weddings and funerals in his constituency.

Today, some Assemblymen make Kuala Lumpur as their base ... and visit their constituency only once in three months.

But when they visit their division, their time is only spared for their branch leaders or staunch supporters. They never meet other people.

That angers the people ... what's the point of becoming a *wakil rakyat* when he doesn't spend the time to meet his people.

That's why I said *budi bahasa, tingkah laku* is very important if one wants to be an Assemblyman.

**Q: Why did the phrase *budi bahasa, tingkah laku* become your choice?**

**A:** Originally, money was not that important to the Malays but *budi bahasa* and *tingkah laku* were.

For example, when we met people, we would greet them with the *salam*. We would meet them every Friday at the mosque.

But today, if you are an Umno leader and *wakil rakyat*, how are you going to attend Friday prayers in your *kampung* if you spend most of your time in Kuala Lumpur?

In those days, the people would invite you to give a brief speech after the prayers. That's one opportunity for us to find out their problems.

**Q: Tan Sri, are you suggesting that the *budi bahasa* and *tingkah laku* of the present Umno leaders and members are bad?**

**A:** Yes ... *dia tak peduli orang tua, dia tak peduli orang muda* (they don't care for the elders, and they don't care for the young).

There's a Malay proverb which says "*Orang tua dihormati, orang muda dikasihi*" (literally translated, respect the elders, love the young).

But today, young people don't respect the elders and that why the elders don't adore the young.

The more educated they (the young) are, the more confused they become. After the recent meeting of Umno veterans, I met Dr Mahathir and asked him whether what I had

it means to love the party ... they utter the words without knowing its meaning.

But there are people who are honest in their struggle for Umno and that's why the party is still around.

The Malays now should be asking what have they benefited from previous Malaysia Plans. We are now in the Eight Malaysia Plan.

Did we ask how many billion ringgit from the previous Plans benefited the Malays?

How much has gone into the pockets of the Malays? Why? If we look at the country's administration, from the Prime Minister down to the ordinary officer, they are Malays.

Why didn't the projects reach the Malays? Where have we gone wrong?

Once, I created a story about a *gajah sarkas* (circus elephant).

In a circus, there are tigers, elephants, snakes and monkeys. Tigers are fed with meat, snakes on cats, monkeys on bananas.

But elephants are only given banana trunks whereas when it comes to raising the big tent, elephants would be forced to pull the ropes and carry the heavy equipment ... and when the circus moves to another destination, the elephants are made to walk, while others are taken in cars.

This is the fate of an elephant. Do the Malays want to be a *gajah sarkas*?

**Q: Is the lack of understanding of the party's struggle at the root of this problem?**

**A:** Yes. As I have said, it is due to lack of explanation of the party's struggles. The members now cannot even differentiate between party and Government.

They do not know their duties and responsibilities as an Umno member. They do not know what unity is all about. "*Yang dia tahu, masuk parti mahu dapat.*" (The only thing they know is they must get something by joining the party.)

Half of the Umno members today join the party just to get projects. They do not know the real reason for joining Umno. They do not know that the struggle in Umno is to protect the race, religion and nation.

The leaders talk about this a lot but they have not proven that their struggles are for the race, religion and nation.

At present, there are three types of leaders in Umno. First are those who really strive to lead the people.

Tunku Abdul Rahman is common.

Why is this happening? Because we have independence. University students are ignorant of this.

Our university students are ignorant of our history and Umno leaders have no interest in going to universities to meet these students and their leaders.

That's why when there are elections of student representatives at universities, the victors are pro-Opposition students.

We have not been creating awareness among the students. I am worried that Umno has become "*momok*" or scared away the young from getting near it.

The solution is simple. Reactivate youth associations and motivate the leaders.

Everytime I was invited to give a talk to the youth, my topic would be "What were our roots, where are we now and what our future holds".

said — *budi bahasa, tingkah laku* — was accurate.

Dr Mahathir agreed with me.

Money is the cause of the bad *budi bahasa dan tingkah laku* of Umno leaders and members.

Tun Sri Lanang in *Sejarah Melayu* said: "*Hai emas, Tuhan bukanlah engkau, tetapi apa yang di kehendak berlaku oleh engkau.*" (O gold, you are not God, but you cause many things to happen.)

I would like to remind Umno members of the saying of Ibn Khaldun. According to him, a race can only survive three human ages.

According to the Quran, one human age is equivalent to 40 years. Therefore, a race can only survive 120 years.

We have seen the downfall of the Soviet Union after 70 years and the collapse of the Malacca Sultanate after 100 years. Will it be the turn of the Malays after 54 years in power? If we are not cautious, we will perish as a result of the split in the community.

Some people are scared to face the fact that one day, "*Melayu akan hilang di dunia*" (the Malays will perish from the world) ... although Hang Tuah had said "*Melayu tak kan hilang di dunia.*" (The Malays won't perish from the world.)

**Q: Some say Umno members are weak and are either scared and embarrassed to openly display their support for Umno? How far is this true?**

A: They are not weak and ashamed of Umno. Perhaps, only a small number who are naive of Umno's struggles would feel that way.

These people became Umno members without knowing and understanding the party's struggles.

This is the weakness of the Umno information bureau. They don't give adequate explanation to the members on the party's struggles.

Umno has a national information chief. They also have information chiefs at State liaison committees, divisions and branches but they have never explained to the people what Umno is all about.

During my time, we held information sessions once or a twice a month at all levels.

I realise today even the Umno members do not know the party constitution. These are Umno's weaknesses.

The problem is Umno members today would only work when there are monetary rewards. They will only work when they get money and even then they don't go all out.

Money is the whole problem. That's why I dare say some Umno members today do not know what

The second can be likened to *ular cintamani*. *Ular cintamani* is a type of white cobra which lives in a hole in a tree trunk.

It has a bodyguard. It uses other snakes to get him food. If the snakes refuse to give him food, it would bite and kill them.

If the trunk rots, it will move to other place and its trail will be cleaned up of its traces by other snakes.

The third is the leader who is an opportunist. Personal interest is his priority, followed by his relatives' interests. The interest of the people come last.

When we become leaders, we are like "*liku sungai, menahan kapar*". Leaders are like a river which has a bend. The bend should stop rubbish from flowing downstream, which means a leader should take the burden of his people.

That's what a leader should be doing.

**Q: Umno has a problem convincing the younger generation to join the party because many question whether the party has a clear agenda for the Malay struggle. How does Umno convince the younger generation of the sincerity of its agenda?**

A: That's why I said information sessions are important. Umno struggles are to protect the religion, race and country from being destroyed.

Blame ourselves for this problem. We have not been teaching our children our own history in schools.

We do not teach our children what Umno is, what its struggles are and why it has to continue fighting to achieve its struggles.

We do not build a foundation for the children to understand Umno.

Another reason is, people look for new things although they have yet to discover that the new things could destroy them.

Unfortunately Umno is an old thing as an Indian said, "*Kalau susu, susu juga, susu pun jadi masam.*" (Milk is milk, and it will turn sour). In any history, no political party lasts forever.

We have also failed to educate student leaders and undergraduates about our history. We have never told them how Umno came into existence, how universities were established.

Do they know how many universities we had before and after independence?

In the 1950s, we would find Malay women shopping at Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman (in Kuala Lumpur).

But today, the sight of a Malay woman driving a Jaguar on Jalan

I would speak for an hour. I talked to them about the history of the Malay race, about Malacca and Palembang and the period under colonisation.

**Q: Education has become an issue lately. The quota system, Bahasa Melayu, English, the quality of students, their vulnerability to the Opposition's influence and inability to compete in the market place are among the issues. Do you think this is due to weaknesses in the national education policy?**

A: These weaknesses have nothing to do with the national education policy. It is a psychological weakness.

The Malays are taking things for granted. They have a perception that they will always be protected.

As a result, there is no perseverance. They always thought they were safe and protected while other races felt otherwise, and that's why other races preserve.

Sometimes, I feel it will be better if we promote the concept of Bangsa Malaysia to force the Malays to work hard and compete with other races.

**Q: Do you think the level of protection given to the Malays should be reduced?**

A: I think it should be reduced. That's why I strongly support Umno's tough action against leaders who were involved in money politics.

All this while we had been closing one eye to money politics. When the leaders at the top committed offences we let them off scot free, and that is why money politics became rampant in the party.

Some may have escaped the punishment this time, but that's their luck.

**Q: Do you think it is time for Umno to take a closer look at the national education policy and suggest to the Government that it be revised?**

A: I do not agree with the way the implementation of the policy was done. The policy also needs to be reviewed to plug its loopholes. We have to take look at the quota system for admission to universities.

I do not understand why the Bumiputera quota could not be filled after 55 years. Bumiputera participation in economy had been targeted to reach 30 per cent under the New Economic Policy but it never materialised. Why?

Dr Mahathir has done all he could to meet that target. The Government has given "pink forms" to Bumiputeras, established Amanah

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can do a lot of things.

Things become complicated when you have one foot in politics and another in the corporate world.

Don't become like Datuk Abdullah Omar (former Muar division chief who was removed by the disciplinary board because of money politics).

His earlier statement indicated that he would quit the party. (Abdullah has since withdrawn his plans to quit the party.) My advice is to forget him.

*"Kalau seekor ayam tak berkokok, tak kan hari tak siang. Banyak lagi ayam yang boleh berkokok, jangan engkau risau."* (If one fowl does not crow, will the day not dawn?)

I am really angry with Abdullah Omar. I have a *pantun* for him:

*"Sayang Selangit ikan bertulang,  
Belah belakang ambil hatinya,  
Saya tak harap tuan seorang,  
Paling belakang banyak gantinya."*

Abdullah might be angry with the *pantun*, but why should I care.

In 1997, I was so disappointed with money politics that I suggested in my speech at the general assembly to just legitimise money politics.

Dr Mahathir was upset with me and criticised me in his speech.

In his speech he said: *"Walaupun abang saya (dia panggil saya abang) tua dua tahun dari saya, tetapi tak patut dia cakap macam itu. Kita harap apa-apa yang keluar dari mulut dia adalah perkara-perkara yang baik."*

(Although my brother (he referred to me as his brother) is two years older than me, he should not have uttered such words. He should only be saying the good things.)

I met him later and said I am sorry but that's what I had wanted to say. It's like telling your children not to play in the rain for fear of catching a cold but they refuse to obey you.

When they refuse to listen to us ... we would say, "Go ahead (fed-up) and bathe in the rain."

**Q: There is a perception that Umno is weak now and many worry whether or not it can win the next general election. What's your opinion?**

**A:** I don't think Umno is weak. Umno is still strong. If we say Umno is weak, many Umno members will also become weak.

Mohamed there, they said he was too young.

I had an experience in Kelantan when I campaigned for Annuar Musa who was then the State Umno liaison deputy chief. I was surprised when they only invited me to speak at a *ceramah*.

They didn't want Annuar to speak because they were angry with him.

There are many problems in Kelantan Umno. A *pantun* can describe aptly the situation in Kelantan:

*"Anak Raja memikul kayu,  
Mari dibuat batang titian,  
Malang nasib anak Melayu,  
Pemimpin banyak berdengki-dengkian."*

The Umno members in Kelantan are well-behaved but the leaders are envious of each other.

There are also problems in Pahang. It was once a stable State. I am sad to see a few problems in Pahang.

As for Terengganu, I think it takes time.

**Q: Do you feel that Umno is not appreciative of the contribution of the veterans?**

**A:** Certainly we feel we are no longer appreciated. I was not even invited now to Jasim's divisional meeting.

**Q: Do you think Umno candidates who were rejected in the last election would be accepted by the voters in the next election?**

**A:** I don't think so...it is difficult. I suggest that Umno assemblymen are allowed to serve two terms the most except for those who really perform.

Assemblymen who perform should be allowed to continue, even to the level of a Minister.

We don't need Assemblymen who don't bring any change. They are many who can take over his place. There are many others who want to go up, and if we don't allow them to up they will find other ways. That's why Umno is having many problems now.

**Q: Can we differentiate between those who can work and the under performers?**

**A:** Don't tell me they don't see it. Don't tell me they can't differentiate between gold and copper? Do we still want to keep them if they are no longer cared for by the people?

Saham Bumiputera, Mara, Tabung Haji ... what else can we do to help the Malay corporate people.

I think the Malay corporate people, if we want to help them, then we should help them the first time. If they still have difficulties, we help them the second time. If they still cannot do it, we should stop helping them ... blacklist them and look for other people.

It is also important we scrutinise the background of the people we want to help. One Malay corporate whom we groomed went overseas and married a foreign personality and there's one who divorced his wife and had to pay her millions of ringgit in alimony.

These people created a lot of problems for us. Sometimes, I feel, there's something good in Suqiu.

Many Malays today, they obtained their wealth not through their own hardwork and initiative.

A proverb says: "*Berakit-rakit ke hulu, berenang-renang ke tepian, bersakit-sakit dahulu, bersenang-senang kemudian.*"

But in the case of some Malay businessmen, they got the comfort without having to go through the difficulties.

There's another proverb which says "*Kalau tidak dipecah ruyung, tidak akan dapat sagunya.*"

But today, the Malays no longer have to break the *ruyung* (outer or harder portion of a palm trunk) because the sago is already there in front of them.

**Q: You have a great oratorical skill. Some people think Umno needs orators who can cast a spell on their audience. Do you know of any individual in the party who has that skill? There are a few in the Opposition like Mahfuz Omar and Ezam Mohd Noor, but who in Umno?**

A: Umno should set up an institution to train people in oratorical skills. I was a debator when I was studying at Tanjung Malim. I acted in dramas and acted with Siput Sarawak but I have not achieved the level of a *seniman*.

There are many orators in Umno. Datuk Annuar Musa was one of them, Datuk Idris Jusoh in Terengganu and a few in Johor and Kelantan but I cannot remember their names.

We had Saifuddin Nasution Ismail but unfortunately he joined Keadylan.

It is sad that Umno today does not recognise people with oratorical skills. Tun Ghafar Baba was known as "Mutiara dari Melaka" (the pearl from Malacca) by Tunku Abdul Rahman.

I was impressed with Anwar Ibrahim's oratorical skills, but unfortunately he was only good on the outside.

**Q: Money politics appears to be Umno's greatest enemy now. When do you think the culture of worshipping money crept into Umno?**

A: As far as I know money politics crept into the party in the 1970s. That doesn't mean that there was none in the 1960s.

In the 1960s, money politics was only confined to buying a cup of coffee. As I said, money politics began when the corporate people joined the party.

I would suggest that corporate people should not be allowed to enter politics. If they are interested in business, they should be groomed to become real corporate people.

They should not enter politics ... be like the Chinese. Be a very powerful businessman. When you become a powerful businessman, you

There are still chances. We must stick to this — respectable *budi bahasa, tingkah laku*.

Don't make money your priority. Those who already have it, take good care of it. Avoid being arrogant.

**Q: Umno bashing has intensified, not only from outside the party but also from within. Will this affect the members?**

A: Umno members should not become *gendang Keling*. In the 1996 general assembly, when I mentioned *gendang keling*, the audience broke into laughter. That showed they didn't understand my message.

Again, this was due to lack of information ... and it also mirrored the inner strength of Umno members.

Previously, Umno members were brothers, now they have become foes.

They think only about ousting others. This is not right.

Now I realise, Dr Mahathir has got to go everywhere (to the grass-roots). He has to attend Teachers' Day in Malacca when in the past, such a function would normally be officiated by an Education Minister.

It seems that he has to do everything now. Everybody seems to be hoping for Dr Mahathir to do their work.

Some of the Umno leaders today appear pulpy. People have no confidence in their leadership. This is another problem.

Everybody is relying on Dr Mahathir. I am worried ... it will be tough for him ... he's already 76.

**Q: What do you think Umno should do to rekindle its glory besides your advice on *budi bahasa and tingkah laku*?**

A: Frankly, it is difficult. But after the disciplinary board's decision, I can see a flicker of hope.

Sometimes, I become pessimistic when I see the behaviour of Umno members.

**Q: Does Umno have enough candidates of calibre to retake Kelantan and Terengganu from Pas in the next general election?**

A: Based on my assessment, it is difficult to win back Kelantan. This is because every Umno leader in Kelantan wants to be the top man.

Everybody wants to be big. Everybody wants to be six feet, and as a result no one in Kelantan is six feet one.

Do you know what I mean? Everybody wants to be in front. Because of that no one leader in Kelantan gets the full support from the leaders.

It didn't work when Umno put Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah there. When Umno put Datuk Mustapha

**Q: Do you think Puteri Umno can attract the young voters especially when there is a perception that certain quarters in Umno are not comfortable with its existence?**

A: They will be able to attract young voters. If there are people who are not comfortable with Puteri Umno, it could be because of their prejudice.

Women are sometimes overly suspicious of others. Some are worried about other people going up.

Puteri Umno should not be bothered about this. Just carry on.

**Q: What role should Umno Youth play in the current political situation?**

A: Umno Youth must be super active. Like what they are doing now, going to the *kampung* — that's good. They have to scrap the elitist image. It is easy to dump that image. Just mix with every level of society.

**Q: What about Wanita Umno?**

A: I think the Wanita Umno is more efficient than the men, especially in their administration of the Kemas classes.

Sixty per cent of the Wanita members work harder than men.

But I realise that the Wanita has not been given places in the division. I think they should be given appointed posts in the division.

In terms of loyalty to the party, they are more loyal than men.

**Q: Do you think the disciplinary board's decision against the culprits of money politics would be sufficient to curb money politics in Umno?**

A: I support the decision. The disease has seeped into the grassroots. If we don't rectify it now, Umno will collapse. The suspension is an effective means to curb it.

**Q: There is a tendency for Umno leaders to lodge police reports against other leaders. Does this mean Umno can no longer resolve its internal problems?**

A: That's why I said the decision of the disciplinary board is important. This is to ensure that the members don't see the problem as serious.

In the past, when the members of the disciplinary board consisted of active members, they had a tendency to protect their friends. Every one of them had their personal interest.

**Q: Why do you think non-Malay parties are raising sensitive issues which are already stipulated in the Constitution? Is this due to Umno's weaknesses?**

A: These parties are fishing in troubled waters. That's the situation.