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Bid to reincarnate the politically dead

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MANY local politicians are like cats - they have nine lives or maybe even more.

Those thought to be dead and buried, politically that is, have been known to be resurrected and come back stronger.

It is almost like undergoing the law of karma, of being reincarnated.

Hence, it is always foolhardy to dismiss the possibility of a politician who has been considered dead of not making a return.

The recent event involving Badan Bertindak Melayu (Malay Action Front) is a classic example in which the organisers are those generally considered to be have-beens or politically dead.

The event suddenly made them look very much alive and kicking.

Regardless of what transpired during the Sunday gathering at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur, the fact remains that the players in BBM have generally been rendered politically inactive since the last general election.

What made the whole thing interesting was that the event, themed "Takkan Melayu Hilang Di Dunia" was supposedly an effort towards Malay unity.

But from news reports and feedback from those present during the function, it appears to be an Umno and party leadership-bashing session.

It chagrined quite a number of Umno leaders, with some questioning the motives of the BBM members.

Despite the negative reaction to the event from some Umno leaders, good things did come out of it.

As pointed out by academician Ahmad Shabery Chik, who is also an Umno member: "To my mind, the action of the BBM leaders, who are also Umno members, in criticising the party leadership proves one thing - Umno is a party that is open and their leaders can be criticised.

"Umno leaders have all this while been labelled as not allowing criticisms and intolerant to members who do so. There is a perception created by Umno detractors that any member who criticises the party leadership will be subjected to disciplinary action or end up being victimised.

"The BBM gathering on Sunday proves otherwise. Furthermore, the fact that BBM carried out their criticisms at the PWTC, a building deemed to be Umno's, disproves the perception that the party leadership is intolerant of dissent."

But in Malay politics, any event or controversy will not whet the appetite of its observers.

Apart from wondering whether the event was staged, there were schools of thoughts wanting to link the episode to the agenda of bigger political names.

To reach that, one has to know who are the players behind BBM.

With names like Datuk Mazlan Harun, Datuk Ibrahim Ali, Tajuddin Abdul Rahman and Datuk Suhaimi Kamaruddin in the forefront, an immediate reaction from those who have been following Umno politics for some time, was to immediately link them to the now defunct Semangat 46.

Inevitably, the next link would be to Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, the president of Semangat, formed after the split in Umno in 1987.

Some described it as coincidental, but others believed it was all part of a bigger agenda in pushing for changes in the party leadership.

Of course, conspiracy theories are in abundance but there is actually a

more concrete basis to the event and participants.

First, one has to understand that these characters from BBM had always been a critical lot while they were in Umno prior to 1987; and when they returned in 1996 they were still critical.

Of course, when they re-embraced Umno, they were critical of those they had just left, be it Pas which was their partner when they were in Semangat.

They were also critical of certain Umno individuals whom they felt were the ones who had stirred up the conflict between Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Tengku Razaleigh.

What they did on Sunday was a reflection of their usual selves, to be critical, and it so happened that this time around they decided to turn their attention to the present leadership.

Furthermore, the Umno divisional elections are just round the corner and getting caught in controversies and being heroic, to be read as anti-establishment, which seems to be trendy in Umno of late, can secure many votes.

"It is merely an effort to remind the top party leadership that they are still activists and have the political acumen to rally support. Finally, they merely want attention," an Umno insider theorised.

While there is justification to the theory, another aspect which unfurled from the whole episode was how some politicians deemed to be lacking in credibility when they were part of mainstream Umno could suddenly regain it when they are outside and decide to be critical of the leadership.

In short, if an Umno man were to support efforts by the leadership, they were brushed aside as being sycophants and if they suddenly decided to be critical, they became credible and accepted as a responsible politician.

But that is not confined within Umno.

There have been numerous cases of Umno members who were in the forefront supporting policies and efforts proposed by the leadership. They were criticised no end by the opposition and detractors of Umno.

The minute they leave Umno and join an opposition party, all their "former sins" are forgiven and they suddenly become role models for members of the new political vehicle they have adopted.

The bottom line is that these politicians are merely trying to find a way to come back from the dead.

And for the people to know that they are alive and kicking, they have to "shout" it out loud. Otherwise, no one will notice.

The only thing is whether their reincarnation is for the better or worse.

It depends on what they did in their previous political life.

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