

24/08/2001

Curbing money politics

THE suspension of eight more Umno leaders for offences related to money politics reflects the party's determination in curbing the scourge which is reportedly filtering down to the grassroots. This is the third time the party's disciplinary board has announced its findings. In the last two, in May and June, 12 officials were suspended. The decision is commendable as mere warnings seem not to have the desired effect. It reflects the party's determination to root out corruption and that it means business - nothing like punitive actions to bring about the deterrent effect. A lesser approach would only cause the practice to become rampant. As a senior partner of the ruling coalition it is doing the right thing and it must be emulated by others.

Those entrusted with responsibility should not indulge in this reprehensible practice. Money politics - the practice of buying and selling votes during elections - is the bane of many societies but that should not be an excuse for not attempting to minimise it or rooting it out altogether. It threatens to weaken the party and undermines its struggle. This must be realised by all and it is vital that members close ranks and accept the board's findings to make it clear to all and sundry that Umno is serious in cleansing itself of corrupt leaders and members. For the party's sake, every member, including those found guilty, must rise above pettiness to wholeheartedly support the call of Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to reject money politics, clean the party of corruption and other unhealthy practices that threaten the party's strength. He and other leaders have reiterated countless times that the party's strength and cohesion, like those during the early days of struggle, must be maintained.

Perhaps, the party's information bureau could create better awareness among members and educate them about Umno's struggle in the wake of the money politics menace that threatens to weaken the party. The reminders of the party's humble beginnings could perhaps bolster the tough disciplinary actions being undertaken in ensuring that money politics is not the culture of Umno. What Umno is doing is not easy as the practice has been known to exist for a long time and ever since the well-heeled city slickers began to vie for elected posts in the party. Some veteran party stalwarts ask whether this is the legacy of the New Economic Policy. They say that its success in uplifting the economic and financial status of the Malays has also brought in its wake the seeds of money politics, corruption, complacency and greed.

Some of these loyal veterans have bemoaned that now, there are members keen to talk more about projects than the party unlike the days of yore. Then, the party was paramount and metaphors and proverbs ruled party discussions and parleying. Members were always harping on the party's struggle and fighting to unite the Malays. To be sure, there are members still honest in their struggle for Umno, which is why the party is still alive. Umno has been able to stay in power because it has managed to change and adapt to changing circumstances and tackle any crisis that arises. It now faces serious challenges which members and leaders have to deal with if the party is to maintain its dominant position in the nation's political life. Money politics, if left unchecked, will severely damage the party's image or, worse, even threaten the very survival of Umno.

(END)