

22/06/2001

How Umno can endure

Dr Zambry Abd Kadir

IT is my personal conviction that if Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad were asked about what he wants most for Umno, the answer would be to see Umno clean from graft and money politics. I think this will be his most memorable accomplishment.

Dr Mahathir has again shown his seriousness in combating money politics in Umno, a move welcomed by many, except those affected.

Since independence, Umno has tirelessly worked for a unique national political culture that remains the basis of our political norms and values.

However, progress and development and the pursuit of modernisation and industrialisation are making our society increasingly utilitarian and geared towards market politics.

As a result, we are slowly moving towards embracing market principles that uphold the principle of maximisation of profit. Individual actors in the market are set to make profit by any and all means. But then there is the most promising opportunity in maximising profit, i.e. merging politics, business and bureaucracy.

Here man, as homo economicus, will find the best model for maximising profit. But while we take our economic pleasure, as it were, we are in a state of denial about the cohesiveness of the party.

People (some may be opportunists) are keen to join the party as they think Umno is a route to wealth. Projects, the award of tenders, and pink forms are very enticing.

They are an exception to those Malays who sincerely contribute to the party. Nevertheless, we still have those whose future hinges upon Umno and their desire to amass a fortune.

They will exert themselves to get political positions, hoping that it will pave the way to their dream to be instantly rich. Holding positions in their respective divisions will help them to get "booty" in the various ministries, particularly in the Finance Ministry.

The lower strata, particularly those followers who are given overseas incentives in various forms by their "maestro", will require continuous treatment even though the Umno divisional meeting is over.

The elected leaders then feel the need to continue the "Medan and Haadyai extravaganza", or money and pieces of land as promised before.

In the long run, Umno has to contend with a new contagious disease spreading through the rank and file. This disease creates further confusion and indirectly weakens the party. One aspect of the confusion is that they see the leadership's wrath over money politics as just another "April fool" surprise.

They do not believe that the Umno top leadership is serious about stamping out money politics.

Second, they believe money politics has become part and parcel of an Umno election. If you want to win, you have to use money, or else you will lose.

In their everyday form of expression they say bagi salah, tak bagi kalah.

So the challenge before everyone is simple. Is it morally right to give money to ensure one's victory? They know that bribing members is wrong, but what is the value of sin compared to the victory?

Third, members should be blamed for making themselves "tax collectors".

If they find more candidates vying for a post, they are more than happy. This is because they are likely to make more money. After all, they say, this kind of season only comes once in three years.

Fourth, members are getting more disillusioned with the criteria to become an Umno leader. There are some who claim that a leader at the divisional level must be rich. If he is not rich then he is not capable of leading the division.

Being a visionary leader, I think Dr Mahathir has already anticipated what will happen to Umno once money politics becomes rampant. He believes that if stern action is not taken, then the whole Umno structure will crumble into history.

History shows that material wellbeing is not sufficient to maintain the party's strength. Umno must continue with its distinct feature - to be consistent in its jihad to fight what is wrong and to uphold what is right.

The course of the nation and the party will be determined by its belief, symbol and values. These components will endure for generations. Let not the parasites annihilate our persistent theme to try and ensure that our people live peacefully.