

09/05/2001

The spectre of money politics

IF money is the root of all evils, then money politics is evil's spawn. For years, Umno has battled the spectre in its midst with limited, or little, success. Money politics has kept growing on the branches and divisions of the party's tree, corrupting twigs, leaves and flowers, and rotting the roots of party ideals that have made people support Umno and the Barisan Nasional coalition since Independence. It lives off on the greed of a few but feeds the majority within the party with filth and dung that none of them deserve.

Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who has begged and pleaded with members to reject money politics many times in the past, knows that the time to go all out against the menace is now or never. If Umno does not show that it is serious in fighting money politics now, it will never be taken seriously in future. Thus, the whip has been cracked; the punishment meted out to six senior members of Umno last week by the party's disciplinary board is a warning to corrupt politicians that their days are numbered. Malaysians in general and Umno members in particular will need to see a bigger haul to be convinced, though. And judging from the reaction of the party president, more heads will roll.

The choice for Umno, as Dr Mahathir puts it, isn't much of a choice: If it doesn't do this, it will lose the support of the people; but if it does it, it will lose those who are not loyal to the party. Umno members loyal to the party will not succumb to money politics but they cannot be mere spectators. Every party-loving man, woman, youth and puteri must participate in this war. Call it a holy war or by any name, the perpetrators of money politics must be located, identified and destroyed at all cost. If Umno tolerates money politics any longer at any level and allow its participants to get off scot free, it will not need the Opposition to defeat it at the next general elections.

How does one fight money politics, corruption and greed in the party? Call in the Anti-Corruption Agency, call in the police, call in the marines. The party's disciplinary board can identify the alleged perpetrators but Umno must allow outside and independent authorities to investigate the accused and let the law take its course. It is, unfortunately, not enough to treat the matter as an internal or domestic problem. While the disciplinary board must have the trust of members, people do remember that not too long ago Umno's disciplinary committee was headed by an individual who was himself later - which was only recently - tried and convicted for corrupt practices and more.

Corruption, which is what money politics basically is, is also an issue that affects society in general and not confined to Umno and its members. The fight against money politics is a good cause that should be "nationalised" so as to encourage other organisations, both political and non-political, to join in and wage the same war. If money politics threatens a political party, its cousins corruption and bribery concern the nation as a whole. Wars against these evils cannot take place in isolation. It must be taught in schools, in kindergartens even, and followed up at work, at home and at play. Political parties in government or opposition that feel or want to be seen as above the problem of money politics are only fooling themselves. Half-baked bids to overcome money politics is even worse.

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