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Ugly politicians do considerable damage to their party and nation

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I READ with interest the article "Are you in it for the rakyat or for yourself" in the P.O. Box 31 column (NST, March 23). The writer's call is loud and clear. Harping on the political and personal ambitions of present day politicians, he has raised two important issues - the integrity of some politicians and money politics.

Although the issues raised have immediate relevance to the run-up to Umno divisional elections this month, it is felt that they are equally applicable to Members of Parliament and State Assemblymen of all political persuasions.

Correlated to the issues is the other question that often surfaces: When does a politician in power retire? The question becomes somewhat more predominant whenever there is an election for party posts. For this reason, the divisional elections have generated a lot of interest not only among party members but all Malaysians in general.

The late Sir Ivor Jennings, who was the Downing Professor of the Laws of England at Cambridge, wrote: "Politics is one of the sweated industries demanding, not exactly blood, tears and sweat but hard and unremitting toil. The remuneration, considering the expense, is poor. It can be justified only in terms of prestige and power..."

True, the duties and responsibilities of an elected representative are indeed very heavy and demanding. He is always at the beck and call of not only the party leaders but the electorate, including those whom he suspects may not have voted for him.

He must be seen instantly at the scene of any incident that occurs in his constituency be it crime, death, fire, flood, or when houses sink, are blown away or swept away by rivers, even though they may have been illegally erected.

He has to attend social and religious gatherings and participate in community projects. Party meetings, Parliament or State Assembly sittings, seminars and official functions do take a lot of his time.

He has to go through bills and deal with correspondence, prepare his speeches and read the dailies and other journals to keep abreast with the changing times. Over and above that, he has a family which needs his love and care. At times, he has to make sacrifices. All in all, the life of a Yang Berhormat is truly tough.

I have great admiration and profound respect for elected representatives as they are really dedicated and try their best to fulfil their obligations to the country and people as enshrined in their oaths of office. They deserve all the support and co-operation of the people.

However, as there are black sheep in every profession, there are also the ugly politicians. These elected representatives do not regard their appointments as divine calling or work selflessly for the economic upliftment of the poor and the under-privileged.

Instead, they adopt ostentatious lifestyles, often living beyond their means. Once elected, they seldom visit their constituencies and frequently skip Parliament or State Assembly sessions.

They give sufficient money to their wakil to take care of their voters. It is these politicians who resort to money politics to remain in power solely to enrich themselves. To them, politics is a passport to prominence and prosperity.

These corrupt politicians, pursuing the seductive nymph of political

power, always stray from the narrow path of rectitude, discarding all norms and moral values, oblivious to the fact that every little transgression brings in its train pain and misery.

The inborn greed perpetually keeps gnawing at them to quench the insatiable thirst for power and plenty. And if they are influential and have large followings they do considerable damage to the party and tarnish the image of the nation. The writer's message, I suppose, is directed at these wily politicians who are yet to be pecked by the sharp-beaked vagaries of politics.

The writer's comments, biting and caustic as they are, should serve as a reminder to these unscrupulous politicians to reflect. As political leaders they are expected to be of exemplary conduct and to lead by example. They must realise, the sooner the better, the evils of money politics. Corruption bleeds the economy. Most importantly, it strikes at the roots of the society's morality.

At the close of the National Vision 2020 Congress held in April 1997, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said:

"... but at this particular moment in time, what seems particularly pressing is the need to ensure the correct balance between material and spritual development. We do not want to be a wasteful consumer society where unbridled materialism runs riot."

He reiterated the need for a strong sense of shame in both the individual and collective consciousness as a vital ingredient in the creation of a truly moral society.

Politicians who hanker after power and glory by indulging in corrupt practices should recall the words of wisdom of Lebanese poet and philosopher Kahlil Gibran:

"Are you a politician who says to himself: `I will use my country for my own benefit?' If so, you are naught but parasite living on the flesh of others. Or are you a devoted patriot, who whispers into the ear of his inner self: `I love to serve my country as a faithful servant.' If so, you are an oasis in the desert, ready to quench the thirst of the wayfarer."