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Weed out the parasites

THE rulings requiring Umno division heads to declare their assets to the party and prohibiting them from having business dealings with any government agency with immediate effect speak volumes about the leadership's efforts to eradicate the scourge of money politics.

Disaffection with Umno rises from the perception that anti-democratic forces - practitioners of money politics - had wormed their way into the heart of the party and subverted it to serve not the interests of the Malays but their very own.

Anti-democratic because they abused the ballot box, the instrument of the people, and turned it against the people.

Needless to say, Umno's political culture is under attack from within since money politics come with a host of attendant problems such as abuse of power, corrupt practices, factionalism and disunity.

Futile as it is to measure its extent, it has, doubtlessly, reached the level where the received wisdom is that business and politics work hand in glove.

It is this nexus, too, that has brought about the perception of an emerging "money-political class" within the Malay community. An element that blights Umno's material achievements for they come with moral failings of the party.

Those who buy votes fail to realise that they are robbing the party of its integrity.

It is no exaggeration that at one point of time, Umno threatens to slip into political wilderness and its survival in the future is in doubt.

Nor is it melodramatic to say that the new rules that bind the division heads are born of Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's realisation that the hopelessness of the future dictates the firmness of the present.

Rules aside, the supreme council's endorsement of the suspension of the six division leaders who were found guilty of winning support through the use of money is a salutary precedent.

It signifies that the leadership is absolutely intent on cleansing the party.

Nevertheless, the rule barring business dealings with the Government requires a monitoring mechanism that will prevent it from being circumvented through the appointment of proxy and machinations of its ilk.

Might we add that such a resolve should be extended to purge money politics from the nation's general election.

There have been previous accusations of candidates enticing people to use their lust, not conscience, to cast votes.

The alleged nexus of companies and political parties has created perceptions of corruption and cronyism in both the corporate and political landscapes.

Perhaps, political parties can reach a consensus on amending the taxation and company laws to enable a donation of one to five per cent of profits for political purposes.

Such donations can be tax-deductible and made payable only by cheque. In addition, a regulatory mechanism monitored strictly by an impartial committee can be set up to monitor the candidates' expenses during the campaign period.

This will necessitate an imposition of a realistic ceiling on campaign

expenses and will require candidates to maintain detailed accounts.

Political bribery in all its variant forms and political parasites should be obliterated.

The rules provide a foundation for a clean Umno. Dare we say that Dr Mahathir has ushered in what may prove to be a radically altered era of Umno politics?

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