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Candidature for sale?

IN Malaysian politics, lobbying carries a narrow and perverse meaning. We are referring to the peculiar brand of lobbyists in national politics. These are the people - mostly aspiring Yang Berhormat - who are quick to echo the views expressed by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, but they do little to champion economic and social justice issues.

Steeped in self-interest, they lobby for the advancement of their political career be it candidatures for party elections or the country's general election. Puteri Umno chief Azalina Othman Said is right in expressing her concern that the movement's members should not be marred by such lobbying, which has been entrenched in the party by Puteri Umno's "parents", some elder Umno members who, in her words, do not practise what they preach. The jostling for power has become a culture in the nation's political parties. That it is less intense among Opposition parties could be due to the fact that there is relatively little to be gained. To argue that this is the inevitable reality of politics is to expunge the notion that politics is the struggle for ideals and thus, should be motivated by high principles.

The issue is not a question of number. The fact that there are people, albeit few, treating the party and national politics as one big cash register is a threat to party unity and stability. In their hands - and there have been cases - democracy is for sale and should they occupy public office, they will attempt to cultivate the spoils system - handing out goodies, mostly in the forms of government contracts, to those who helped them to win. As it is, the country's political culture is being polluted by what is known as the 3Cs of politics: connection, clout and cash. The virus bred by the 3Cs is corruption.

Misplaced self-righteousness prompted some Umno members to castigate Puteri Umno for its alleged act of hatching wild accusations and creating mischief. But as revealed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, there are party members who are using Puteri members as tools to lobby for them in their bids for candidatures in the general election. Puteri members must pay heed to their chieftain's advice: Do not be influenced or swayed by the political cannibals - the despicable species that devour party principles and struggles as well as their compatriots to ascend the party and clinch public office.

Although lobbying within bounds is acceptable, backroom politics need not be characterised by back-stabbing, wayang kulit and poison-pen letters. Apart from money politics, our political culture is tainted by the poison-pen letters - a practice increasingly seen in the MCA - which are nothing more but receptacles of conspiratorial evil against some national leaders and against one another. Any complaint of abuse of power against the leaders should be lodged with the authorities, not cowardly composed in unsigned epistles.

Rather than contributing to an unhealthy political culture, Umno and the BN components should engage with the grassroots and stabilise party membership and national support. More importantly, they should go beyond the present efforts in creating a framework to engage with the electorate. There is no single bullet solution to purge the BN of its inner contaminants. We believe the solution comes in the form of a wide-ranging and comprehensive reassessment of all aspects of its political framework

and culture.