

Sabah ministers too afraid to speak up
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I refer to the malaysiakini report No rush to fill DCM vacancy, says Musa.

Chong Kah Kiat's resignation as a Sabah cabinet minister probably shows yet another sign that something is not right in the state led by Umno's Musa Aman who is currently under fire for his alleged involvement in corrupt practices and mismanagement of power.

In September last year, Chong made a decision to quit as president of the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) - considered as a 'mosquito party' in Sabah. Known for his no-nonsense approach to politics and strict adherence to values and principles, he went against the grain in 2001-2003 by launching a massive operation to weed out illegal immigrants in Sabah.

Under his leadership, Sabah's tourism industry has also developed tremendously, if not phenomenally, compared when other ministers took charge of the Tourism Ministry. He might be one of Sabah's best cabinet ministers based on popular grassroots opinion. One can go with other superlatives to describe Chong's performance as former chief minister and cabinet minister without ignoring the fact that as a human being, he also makes mistakes sometimes.

But the point that I am trying to make here is that other state cabinet ministers must not wait too long to do something drastic (not necessarily through an abrupt resignation though) if they sense something wrong with regards to the leadership and policy implementation.

The problem in the state cabinet now is that, under the pretext of peace and harmony, no one is brave enough to speak out and be critical to the leadership of Musa Aman and particularly to his much publicised policy known as 'halatuju' (direction).

The overused term 'halatuju', though it could be good to Sabah and its people if implemented scrupulously, has been swallowed rather uncritically by the cabinet ministers and has not been produced publicly for public debate. As some people in Sabah generally believe, the 'halatuju' policy is no more than just a paper document aiming at enriching Umno politicians with lucrative contracts. It might be too early to speculate on the reasons behind Chong's resignation (especially its connection with Musa's leadership).

But the indication is strong that Chong's resignation has something to do with his dissatisfaction with the way Musa runs the state government. The perceived causes for the strained relationship between Musa and Chong can be traced back to not long ago when the latter refused to let the former develop the Sipadan Island due to environmental concerns.

The issue had also backfired on Musa when it caught the attention of the prime minister who ordered projects on the Sipadan Island be stopped indefinitely. The final straw that caused Chong to call it quits was when Musa had differences with him over the plan to build a statue of the Goddess of Mercy in Kudat.

However, what is saddening is the prime minister's response that Chong's resignation is 'not a loss' to Sabah. For someone who has stood by his values and principles - a trait that not many politicians in Malaysia, let alone in Sabah, espouse - the prime minister should have

been more measured in his evaluation.

Chong has once again shown that he is the kind of leader who is independent in thinking and who is unafraid to call a spade a spade. I am sure there are also leaders in the state cabinet who share the same personal traits as Chong's but are afraid to act due to reasons best known to them.

I appeal to these leaders not to wait too long to act in line with the prime minister's call to produce a transparent and democratic government. This is the time for you to prove your worth to the rakyat who had taken the pains to vote you as their representative.

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