

Razaleigh: The way we are now
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Umno dissident Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, resuming his discourses on the state of the nation and how it got the way it is now, said the big difference between the Merdeka set of leaders and their successors was the “generational responsibility” that marked the former.

In a speech at the New Club in Taiping last night, the Gua Musang MP, who in the last two years has engaged in public musings on the state of the Malaysian polity, said that the nation's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, “symbolised the concept and conviction of generational responsibility in his vision.”

Tunku Abdul Rahman and his generation were dedicated leaders, not for power but a sense of duty to the present and the future,” asserted Razaleigh.

“They were not in politics for the money or for themselves. Indeed, even after they had assumed power, they never used their position to benefit themselves or their families, nor did they build loyal cronies who would act as their financiers or hold any wealth unlawfully earned at the expense of the people,” he added.

Razaleigh said the Tunku had proclaimed at Independence in 1957 that “Malaysia is a parliamentary democracy with an independent judiciary” and he had “a vision of a happy nation in spite of the formidable economic obstacles we needed to solve.”

“After that dawn of independence, there was a search of how we could achieve this happy society, fulfilling the needs and aspirations of all Malaysians which was to continue for the generations to come,” said Razaleigh.

A pyramid of cronies

The Umno gadfly, speaking at the invitation of the Perak Academy, an intellectual body dedicated to evoking public debate on the great questions of the day, went on to describe what had gone terribly wrong after the auspicious start given by the Tunku.

“One of the greatest losses in public life and in politics today in Malaysia is that loss of generational responsibility. Everything seems to be surrounded by greed and the desire to be billionaires.

“This had led to a pyramid of cronies within the incumbent political parties and their associates in business. It is this combination of the hierarchy of political cronies and business cronies that led to the centralisation of power in the incumbent political leadership and in the Office of the Prime Minister.

This power in one individual allowed the manipulation of the political system; I mean by this the institutions of power, including the media.

“In exchange for the centralisation of power, greed and self-interest were encouraged by example and in the guise of racial loyalty deserving rewards. This is the case in all the parties within the power structure. This state of affairs is one of the most dangerous and difficult to dismantle because there has been three decades of centralised power.”

Razaleigh said the props for this centralisation of power were the practice of the politics of cant, of “double think” and “double talk.”

“One of the features which is alarming in this plan to maintain status quo is the encouragement covertly of racial and religious obscurantism.

“The underlying theme was a policy of using a balance of racialism and religion on the one hand and talks of unity on the other hand in order to make the people hostage to the status quo of power.

“As a result, racialism and racial concerns seem to have a grip on all aspects of our lives, in politics, economics, education and employment, irrespective of the present reality which has got nothing to do with race or religion. We are deliberately made to feel that we are hostages to these forces.”

Glaring disparities in income

Razaleigh said this climate of fear was perpetuated by the abrogation of the freedom of speech and of dissent which are guaranteed by the Merdeka Constitution.

He said this abrogation has led to glaring disparities in income, not only among the races but also within each race, with a politically-connected business elite being allowed to amass wealth at the expense of the common weal.

It is in this context that I raise the issue about independent power production companies (IPPs).

“The privatisation of contracts are today protected by the Official Secrets Act, and therefore we are unable to really know whether or not the public and Petronas, as trustees of the public, are directly or indirectly subsidising these companies and the tycoons who are benefitting at the expense of the public,” he charged.

Razaleigh said this misappropriation of national institutions for plutocratic interests was best exemplified by the way Petronas and Bernas were being run.

“Recently, Petronas announced that it had made a RM90.5 billion pre-tax profit. If we accumulate the profit of Petronas over the years, it would come to a mind-boggling figure of billions and billions. Yet, the greatest poverty is found in the petroleum producing states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Sarawak, and Sabah.

“This moral inconsistency in a way exemplifies how the nation's economy is mismanaged and how the institutions set up in the 1970s have lost their objective and commitment to solving the immediate and pressing problems of the nation.”

Razaleigh cited Bernas as another example of the abuse of national assets for private gain.

“Bernas is one example of a privatisation of an essential commodity as a monopoly for a group of people and owned partially by two companies in Hong Kong.

“An essential commodity such as rice should not have been privatised for business purposes. We are the only rice-producing country that has privatised and given as a monopoly to one company the importation and distribution of all rice products.

Imported rice cheaper in Singapore

The reality today is Thailand and Indonesia are self sufficient in rice and we are dependant on 30 percent of imported rice. But because it is a monopoly, imported rice is cheaper in Singapore than Malaysia.

Privatisation for the benefit of private individuals to profit from such an essential commodity is a clear abuse of power. It would not have happened in those days.

“But with the centralisation of power in the Office of the Prime Minister, who had the party under his absolute control, anything was possible!”

Razaleigh said the way out of the political and economic stalemate the country is to reverse the centralisation of power in the hands of the prime minister and the attorney-general.

“We need to reclaim as citizens of Malaysia our rights in a democracy; that power and authority are positions of trust and responsibility, not to serve personal interest or as an opportunity for personal enrichment.

“We need to reassert as politically active and responsible citizens the concept of social obligation and public service in those who seek political office. Power is duty, not a prize.”

Razaleigh speech's has to read in its entirety to grasp the salience of his critique of the way things are and how it got that way.

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