

Keep politics out of Hindu Endowments Board
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While I wish to congratulate Chief Minister, Lim Guan Eng for his generosity to fund the Hindu Endowments Board (HEB) a sum of a RM1 million recently during Thaipusam, I am saddened that he has lately allowed the HEB to become a battle field for two groups of DAP Indian politicians as their punching bags. (See Malaysiakini letter by observer - PHEB needs a total revamp on Mar 8, 2012)

An adverse remark in Malaysiakini on 13 February, 2008 titled 'Penang Hindu board must go, says DAP' only reminds me that the HEB is re-infested with another round of political virus that may destroy the ideals and objectives of the Hindu trusts that benefits the Hindu community.

Lim Guan Eng should emulate the late Dr. Lim Chong Eu for the latter's bravery to revamp HEB in 1989 primarily to open the doors of the board to new ideas and talents and to replace the old practice of "substitution" of a commissioner in the event of his/her death or resignation that had plagued the board for many years and also to give the board independence free from political interferences.

HEB's ideals been hijacked by unscrupulous persons

To the adverse remarks by the current DAP politicians in the HEB, please be reminded that the HEB is a statutory body answerable only to Parliament and it is crystal clear that the board is not accountable to any Tom, Dick and Harry including to all and sundry with regards to its accounts and affairs.

I am puzzled to see that these learned guys ignorantly call for the display of its accounts to all and sundry when it has no powers in the first place in its Ordinance, including that of the collection of donations unlike a registered society managing religious affairs and temple consecration ceremonies.

The HEB is not a religious entity and past commissioners who had benefited one way or rather from it, should come up in the open to defend this shining truth.

Its accounts managed under Section 7 of the HEB Ordinance are under the purview of Auditor-General of Malaysia and the respective minister tables its reports and accounts in Parliament.

The revamp of 1989 be emulated

The first Hindu Endowment Board was appointed after the Muslim endowments had been taken out to be placed under the Majlis Ugama Islam on 1st January, 1967 and only seven commissioners were appointed namely: D Baboo (retired teacher), T Subbiah (lawyer), S Lethumanasamy (businessman), K. Narayansamy (businessman), R. Jayaraman (Private Auditor), P. Rajendra (MPPP secretary) and the Collector of Land Revenue, Penang.

The MIC gained entry into the HEB when its Chairman, D Baboo died in April, 1975, and a commissioner, T Subbiah (who became MIC state chairman) took over as its chairman.

The HEB became the targets of onslaughts and legal suits from DAP that greatly affected its overall efficiency and property developments/improvements became an impossibility.

While taking advantage of the defeat of the MIC candidate in the Prai state elections of 1986 I presented the following recommendations to State Executive Council in 1987:

1. To Gazette the new Hindu Endowments Board Rules which determined among others to limit a one year term of office for each commissioner while exempting a term of the ex-officio secretary for continuity;

and

2. To appoint 11 new commissioners on a yearly term of office to reduce politicking in the board.

The revamped HEB had its obstacles

The first Revamped HEB came into being on 1st March, 1989 with AS Maniam, a retired Assistant Registrar of Societies being elected as chairman while K Ponnampalam, a former Director of Social and Welfare Services, being elected as its vice chairman and the Deputy Director of Land and Mines, Penang appointed as its ex-officio secretary since the HEB administers land and money.

The management committees of all endowments were initially constituted with new protem-committees of not more than five non-political members for each with R Rajasingam to head Waterfall/Queen Street, PK Subbaiyah to head Butterworth and K Narayanan to head Raneer Dhoby Ghaut endowments.

The relapse of politics resulted due to defeat of late the Dr Lim Chong Eu in the general elections of 1990 and his successor Dr Koh Tsu Khoo did not pursue the ideals entrusted to him.

He even unresistingly succumbed to the negative call of The Malaysia Hindu Sangam for the abolishment of the HEB and calling for its return of all the management of temples to the Hindu community.

The Malaysia Hindu Sangam (MHS) leading other NGO's convened a public meeting in order to obtain a referendum to dissolve the HEB.

With the assistance of veteran office-bearers namely M Subramaniam of Hindu Mahajana Sangam (MHS) and AR Velu of Penang Hindu Sabha (PHS) and the late Kumaraguru Manickam Mudalliar, I managed to distribute a written article both in Tamil and English to the Hindu public giving information on the HEB's ideals and purposes and a track record of its achievements including safeguards of the trust properties worth RM100 million comparing with the inferior track records of MHS/NGO's achievements.

Our endeavour to protect the HEB's interests succeeded when the BN state government abandoned the plaguing disaster of a dissolution mooted by Malaysia Hindu Sangam from many years back.

Absence of key man

Having achieved the desired goals for the HEB, I opted to retire in 1993 despite strong requests by few commissioners to stay back.

Accordingly I handed over the office appurtenances including all files, monies, valuables and documents to the Penang State Principal Assistant Secretary, M/s G Vijayaletchumi, its ex-officio secretary then, in the presence of the board's Chairman, AS Maniam and commissioners and to their satisfaction.

A luncheon send off ceremony was held by the commissioners namely Dato' AS Maniam. Late Dato' K Ponnampalam, Dato' V Sithambaram, Dr PP Shah, the late Kumaraguru Manickam Mudalliar, Valli Muthsamy, Arumugam and others.

No sense of gratitude

The painstaking efforts and risks taken to remove the politically based commissioners has not rung the bells to many as we do find unscrupulous politicians clambering to become commissioners for personal advantage and benefits at the expense of the HEB.

While I have regrets in creating "enemies" of certain politicians and NGO's for their total removal from HEB, the presence of the board, which has benefited numerous Indian politicians, professionals including certain Pakatan politicians at our expense, remains an undeniable testimony.

Nevertheless, a Malay proverb Lembu punya susu, Sapi dapat nama seems justifiable.

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