

Three-corner tussles - let NGO panel decide

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By Kua Kia Soong

With the impending 13th general election and the general aspiration of the people to avoid disastrous three-corner challenges as in the past, I propose an independent NGO committee to adjudicate in constituencies where there will be such situations.

It is time we found a solution to the usual wasteful internecine squabbles within the anti-BN coalition at every general election which can only lead to bad blood being spilled. This time around, I believe there will be more squabbles with the emergence of the third force and parties such as PSM.

Even before nomination, we already know there will be such a tussle at Jelapang in Perak.

During the 2008 general election, there was a three-corner fight there with PSM's M Sarasvathy and the DAP's Hee Yit Foong taking on the BN. Hee won, only to leapfrog to become an Independent not long after, hardly a good example of brute political realpolitik!

The DAP's justification for not giving way to Sarasvathy then was no different from their current position.

Thus, to Haris Ibrahim's (Anything But Umno) suggestion of a debate between Sarasvathy and the DAP's selected candidate to see who is a better candidate for the seat, the Perak DAP chief said: "There is no need for a debate to decide who is the best candidate to contest the Jelapang state seat... Ngeh (Koo Ham) said the candidate for Jelapang would be shortlisted by the DAP and finalised by Pakatan Rakyat."

Is this the brave new Malaysia we want?

Is that the end of the matter? There is no need to decide who is the best candidate for any seat? The people will have to take it or lump it? As in the past, the DAP's position is that it is none of our business - candidates will be decided by the Pakatan parties themselves. Might is right?

Well, might gave us Hee in 2008. But we are not merely concerned with turncoats who change from Coca Cola to Pepsi Cola. We want candidates who are aware of social justice, democracy and human rights and have a vision of the type of society we want.

So is this where all the peoples' power of recent years has led to? The political tsunami of 2008 was only possible with the goodwill of the people and civil society in their concerted action to vote out the BN.

Jelapang was a quintessential example of the failure of the DAP in putting up a trustworthy candidate, never mind a candidate with noble political principles and service

record such as Sarasvathy. At Jelapang, there was simply no comparison between Hee Yit Fong and Sarasvathy and yet the DAP insisted on their brute political right to decide.

And certainly, Jelapang will not be the only arena where there will be three-corner tussles; the Human Rights Party (HRP) and the Third Force plan to field their candidates as well. This scenario will be repeated in other general elections in the future so we might as well make a start now.

The moral high ground

With the benefit of hindsight, civil society should be more proactive in making an adjudicatory stand on the best candidates to represent the people and intervene to decide the best candidates to take on the BN.

Pakatan Rakyat can of course choose to ignore civil society's choice of the best candidate in a three-corner fight but at least we can stand on the moral high ground to let the people know the better candidate in each case. In this way, by having an objective non-partisan civil society committee adjudicating, we can also avert unnecessary acrimony between Pakatan and the third force.

Let us not discount the fact that in some seats, the Pakatan candidate may be selected by this independent committee as the more suitable candidate to take on BN!

Such an adjudicatory committee from civil society should of course be seen to be independent by all parties. It would play this historic role of adjudicating to select the most suitable candidate for any seats with three-corner fights.

Malaysian civil society's GE13 demands as benchmark

Not long now, Malaysian civil society will be launching its '13th general election demands'. The aspiring candidates can be interviewed by the committee to gauge their awareness, stand and record on these political demands of the Malaysian people. If there is time for debates, this would be an even better gauge of their suitability.

Ultimately, it does not matter if the peoples' representatives are from BN or Pakatan or the Third Force if they do not have a clue about the peoples' economic, political, social and cultural rights and the people-oriented policies we want.

If these seats can be settled before nomination day as in Jelapang, so much the better. Otherwise, this independent NGO committee has all the time until nomination day to make its selection. We can only hope that once this committee has made its considered selection of the most suitable candidate for the seats, the parties concerned will respect its decision.

I believe such an intervention by civil society will not only help to avoid split votes that will only benefit the BN but also enhances the civil society's participation in our democracy. This process will also test the sincerity and political maturity of the Pakatan parties.

Needless to say, the integrity of the parties will be tested in this 13th general election. Parties which fail the test will suffer the consequences in the new politics after the election.

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