

Chinese should no longer puzzle Taib
Malaysiakini.com
August 25, 2010

COMMENT It's the height of irony for Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud to claim that he has done everything he can to win the support of the Chinese community for his ruling coalition, and yet failed. This will not serve as any excuse for him with the ruling elite in Putrajaya, who bank on him being a good proxy for their interests.

The Chinese, in Taib's own words, puzzle him no end. One would think that Taib, during his years in power since 1981, had done everything possible to drive the Chinese away from the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN).

Finally, the Chinese community decided that enough was enough and since 2006 began ditching the Barisan Nasional. In that year, several seats fell to the opposition, which won by default. It was not a vote for them, but a vote against the BN.

NONE Wasn't it the Chinese who saved Taib's hide when Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS) teamed up with Malay rebels from his Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) in 1987 to oust him in a virtual coup d'état dubbed the Ming Court Affair? True the Dayaks from Pesaka stood by Taib (right), but their support alone wasn't enough to keep him comfortably in the saddle.

What did the Chinese get from Taib in return? To cite a recent case, Taib told the Chinese that if they weren't interested in renewing their expired land leases at the exorbitant rates set by his state government, "there were others who were keen on the lands that they now occupy".

It's as if Taib expects the Chinese to simply vacate their properties, leaving them to the state government free-of-charge, and flee elsewhere like the Penan - "the animals referred to by Taib" - and the people of Bakun and Batang Ai.

NONE Even now, the land lease agreements are being renewed by the Land Office on a selective basis. Those who voted against the BN in the recent by-election in Sibu are not getting the discounts announced by Taib on the eve of polling. The discounts came after Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (left) shamed Taib into action by insulting the voters of Sibu: "I want to make a deal with you. You do something for me and I will do something for you."

Chinese no more the kingmakers

Even before Taib's calculated insult against the Chinese on the land-lease issue, the chief minister had embarked on a series of measures to neutralise, marginalise and eliminate them from Sarawak politics. This has seen the Chinese community reduced from being kingmakers in the state to irrelevance.

At one time, the threat of Chinese support for the majority Dayak community and their legitimate aspirations was enough to bring Taib and his maternal uncle, Abdul Rahman Ya'kub, to their senses and into toeing their line. It's a different story today.

The BN has allotted the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) 19 state seats out of the 71 at stake in the state. This number includes four Dayak seats, which means the Chinese political strength is even less than it seems. The DAP has been whittling away at this number in recent years and is poised to consign Supp into the dustbin of political history.

The major strategic political mistake of the Chinese in Sarawak was not to support the Ming Court rebels and to back Taib when they had the chance to do so. Initially, it began as a Malay revolt against Taib, before PBDS jumped on the bandwagon.

The other major strategic mistake was to go along with Taib's systematic attempts to politically emasculate the Dayak majority, first by spawning the 1983 breakaway of PBDS from the Sarawak National Party (Snap), and then the emergence of Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) from PBDS, which was deregistered.

The move to register the Malaysian Dayak Congress (MDC) to replace PBDS was rejected, and this was followed by the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) breakaway from Snap, which was deregistered until saved by the court. In the meantime, PRS was almost deregistered, but the timely 2008 general election saved the party from certain death.

Mistake of putting all political eggs into one basket

These two major strategic mistakes by the Chinese combined to confirm that they had placed all their political eggs in one basket - the Taib-Rahman political dynasty.

If the Chinese thought that this would bring about a major windfall for them, with the Dayaks out of the way and the Malays put in their place after Ming Court, they were sadly mistaken.

While PBB's seats in the state assembly grew by leaps and bounds, Supp's allocation fell drastically from the percentage it held during Stephen Kalong Ningkan's time,

The Chinese have since realised that all their political moves since 1981, when they ousted Rahman Ya'kub, from power have all been one mistake after another.

Taib lost no time in capitalising on the political mistakes of the Chinese and their growing irrelevance in the state government to put a finger in every pie in Sarawak. If there was money to be made anywhere in Sarawak, nothing moved until Taib gave his approval, but at a price.

The chief minister, his family and their dynasty grew enormously wealthy, as those with eyes can see, even as the Chinese suffered economically and had to make do with the crumbs like the Dayaks and Malays. Sibu is a classic example of the Chinese economy in Sarawak being in the doldrums.

Umno waiting to move in

Taib should no longer be puzzled about the Chinese. He should write off their support during the forthcoming state election, which should be held by the middle of next year. They have crossed the Rubicon.

What worries the Chinese in Sarawak the most is that Taib has created a situation in the state where Umno can march in, as it did in neighbouring Sabah, and take over on the ruins of PBB. It's an accepted argument that PBB will be history after Taib's exit.

The Chinese are wishing now that they had not been a party to Taib's calculated destruction of Snap, which provided the first and second chief ministers for the state, Stephen Kalong Ningkan and Penghulu Tawi Sli.

Denying the Dayaks their rightful place under the Sarawak sun has cost the Chinese dearly. They will have a lot of time to repent at leisure in the years ahead as Umno stamps its mark and authority on the state.

The ruling party in Putrajaya is finished with running Sarawak through proxies. Its Sabah experience has shown that this can be done in Sarawak as well so as to directly shore up its position in Parliament - even as the opposition hounds bay for its blood at its doorsteps.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/141037>