

No silent night this Christmas
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There may be no silent night during Christmas this year, and the New Year may not be a real happy one, as far as the local political scenario is concerned. From now till the actually polling day of the by-election in the Tenang state in Johor, we will be having some real hot political debates, given the anticipated ferocious campaigning.

There is no doubt that, as opposed to authoritarian systems, democracy is better. But democracy is not perfect, and there are many flaws and shortcomings.

Voting is a democratic practice, and an integral part of the democratic process. But it is not what democracy is all about. Democracy does not mean just the freedom to vote, but involves transparency and accountability of the political system, and equitable governance.

Malaysia has inherited and adopted the British parliamentary electoral system. One of the shortcomings of this system is that each constituency can only elect one representative. Only the one who received the highest number of votes is elected; other candidates, even if they had lost by only just one vote, have no claim to represent the people.

In democratic elections, the majority is all-powerful, while the minority is rarely able to exercise any power. The fact is that the winner takes all, and the loser is sidelined. .

Wherever there are elections, there will be electoral rules and regulations, but also election campaigns.

In countries which are democratic in name only, the electoral laws are enacted to favour the ruling party. Whenever there is change in political control, the new rulers will use their majority advantage in the Parliament to modify the electoral laws or re-demarcate constituencies to strengthen their chances of winning in future elections to continue their hold on power.

Because the winner wins all, the loser loses all, so in the election, the ultimate goal is to win whatever the cost. As its process, especially in the election campaign, these will appear: abuses of power, distortion, incitation, scorn, slander, smear campaign, framing, name calling, or bribing voters. Some people will always be evil and become unscrupulous whenever there is advantage or benefit involved. They will do their utmost to gain self-benefits, and will freeze their conscience and sell their souls in the process.

Since the March 2008 general election, our country has held 13 by-elections. Looking back at all these elections, do we see any gradual improvement in the political culture, or are we seeing the same negative election culture staged continuously?

It is foreseeable that in the one month ahead, in addition to the sweet melodies of Christmas carols and New Year songs, there will be plenty of verbal diarrhea flooding the media, and bickering and squabbles in the anticipated wars of words. The tranquil, peaceful and quiet Tenang constituency will suddenly be invaded by political figures in the guise of the chubby Santa Claus outfit or the Chinese God of Wealth, offering the voters all sorts of promises, with the ruling party having an upper hand by giving instant grants and making instant repairs to roads and schools, and even private homes.

Despite all the shortcomings, it is hoped that the Tenang voters will observe calmly, think rationally and vote wisely in the upcoming by-election. - mysinchew.com

* The views expressed here are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of Malaysian Mirror and/or its associates.

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