

WAVELENGTH: The last thing the Dayak parties need is a war

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Jan 21: AS the Sarawak State election approaches, all indications seem to point to another easy victory for the Barisan Nasional.

However, the focus of attention in the run-up to the polls will be on some "unfinished" business arising from the recent turmoil in the governing coalition's two Dayak-majority parties — the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) led by Datuk William Mawan Ikom and the Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) led by Datuk Seri Dr James Jemut Masing.

The five elected representatives of the de-registered Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak, who chose to remain "party-less", are not about to let the apparent victors of their intra-party rivalry have it easy.

Having clearly failed to gain entry into the dominant Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu as a group, two of the five representatives who are State assemblymen opted to join SPDP instead of PRS, which claims to be the successor party to Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak.

This move by the duo has predictably set off an unseemly row between SPDP and PRS as to which party rightfully "owns" the constituencies of the two new SPDP members.

If there is anything that truly frustrates ordinary Dayaks, it is the spectacle of incessant political fighting within and between the parties claiming to represent them, allowing "outsiders" to interfere and even exploit the ensuing political fissures.

It is time Dayak leaders regained the political initiative so that they can credibly bid to be the voice to set and advance the Dayak "agenda", of which the paramount concern must be allowing Dayaks to catch up with others in Sarawak. In order to gain back the trust and respect of ordinary Dayaks after the debilitating political fights of recent years, the perceived winners need to demonstrate uncommon statesmanship.

That heavy responsibility now falls squarely on the shoulders of both Mawan and Masing.

Starting a new fight over the two floating State constituencies only reminds Dayaks of the unedifying status quo ante and will diminish the standing of both leaders.

The two leaders and their parties must come to a common understanding on how best to advance their cause and in so doing, advance the overall Dayak cause.

The catch-phrase must be unity. The singular act that Mawan and Masing should aim for to capture the popular imagination of Dayaks is the political merger of their two parties.

There seems to be nothing on the horizon currently that stands in the way of a political merger. Other parties of the State BN are in favour of it. The timing, on the eve of a State election, is also right.

Pulling off a political merger will permanently secure a favourable place in the history books for both Mawan and Masing.

They would have set rolling a bandwagon that dispirited and disaffected Dayaks had waited

long for.

The effects will be such that other statesmen of all stripes, persuasions and background will want to get on the bandwagon; any remaining malcontents will appear inconsequential and doomed to be left at the wayside.

Alas, such a supreme act of statesmanship also calls for sacrifice and therein lies the rub.

Having fought so hard and furiously to secure the leadership of their respective parties, is either Mawan or Masing capable of the inevitable compromises that political merger would entail?

Source:

http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/nst/Saturday/Columns/20060121081357/Article/index_html