

Umno's interests too embedded into Malaysia's, says FT writer

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 20 — The intertwining of Umno's interests with Malaysia's as a result of its decades-long rule is being exposed in the crisis following investigations into a state-owned firm, a *Financial Times* writer said.

Pointing out that allegations that surfaced from the probe would have been damaging elsewhere lead to censure, the British daily's David Piling said that these were instead being held up to defend the party and the administration against claims of graft.

Putrajaya's shakeup of the Cabinet and key government institutions following the same investigation also demonstrates the dangers of concentrating power in a single arm of the government, Piling added.

"That is Malaysia's real problem. Umno interests and those of the nation have been artificially fused. For the good of Malaysia, they should be prised apart," Piling added.

From the nexus between Umno and Putrajaya, Piling added that Malaysia was now facing a crisis in its institutions, which he added were not strong to begin with.

As example, he cited Datuk Seri Najib Razak's administration's removal of Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail as Attorney-General and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as deputy prime minister, recruitment of four members of the Public Accounts Committee into government posts, and move to suspend two newspapers.

"As prime minister, Mr Najib wields enormous authority. As president of Umno, whose interests often trump those of the state, he perhaps wields even more," Piling wrote.

Piling's sentiments echo that of the so-called G25, a pressure group formed by retired Malay civil servants, which yesterday told Putrajaya that the country's institutions must be allowed to function freely and independently to remove suspicions over them.

It urged the government to break up the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) to remove its prosecutorial powers from under the executive, and sought for the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to be given its own authority to prosecute graft cases.

Citing economic uncertainty fuelled by the declining ringgit as well as the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal, the G25 also told the federal government not to cast aspersions on Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) officials as well as those among the country's vital institutions.

The AGC, MACC, and BNM together with the Royal Malaysia Police were part of a now-disbanded taskforce investigating 1MDB as well as allegations linked to a RM2.6 billion deposit into Najib's personal accounts.

The MACC has since said that the deposits were "donations" from the Middle East.

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