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The very real danger of crying wolf

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PEOPLE who like to raise the alarm to get attention should be reminded of the story of the boy who cried wolf.

The boy in the story could have called for help to attract attention or to overcome the boredom of attending to his flock of sheep day after day.

The first few times he did it, the villagers rushed to his aid, but upon realising that the boy was raising a false alarm, they stopped responding.

So, on the day that a pack of wolves actually turned up to devour his sheep nobody responded to his cries.

A young shepherd might not fully realise the consequences of fooling around with people.

But surely those in high places have a much greater thinking capacity than a shepherd boy. It is their business to understand the way the people think and act.

Yet we repeatedly come across people who have no qualms about crying wolf to get attention.

There had been many such cases. The latest being the resignation threat by Datuk Ghapur Salleh, who on Dec 13 publicly tendered his resignation as Sabah Deputy Chief Minister, State Finance Minister and Sabah Umno deputy liaison chief, citing failure to perform his duties and "personal problems."

His resignation from government positions was supposed to have taken effect on Dec 18, the last day of his leave.

Even after Deputy Prime Minister and Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said party leaders would discuss Ghapur's resignation, the Sabah politician said his decision was final.

On Dec 19, he met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur and soon after, withdrew his resignation.

It would have been nicer and certainly more proper for Ghapur to discuss his intention with his bosses, including Dr Mahathir, before making the announcement, unless his intention had all along been to test the water.

Furthermore, if he thinks he has failed in his job and has personal problems, staying on may not be to his best interest or that of the rakyat.

If politicians and others in power do this often enough, they are bound to lose the respect of the people. Their pledges, pleas, warnings and threats will not be taken seriously.

Even people who once believed in them and held them in high esteem would lose respect for them. They would no longer feel secure and in due course cease to support them.

As the Malay saying goes, kerbau dipegang pada talinya, manusia dipegang pada cakupnya (a buffalo is held by the rope, a man by his words).

As for the boy who cried wolf, he might not have done so had he known more about the beast.