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Leaders must be sincere

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IT was really not surprising to hear the chorus of voices from leaders across the country expressing their willingness to step down to make way for new blood.

After Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad remarked that perhaps it would be better if everyone stepped down to enable Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to start with a clean slate when he assumes the premiership (NST, Jan 27), it was almost to be expected that everyone upon whom the proverbial shoe would fit, felt a need to voice support for the idea.

Whether their support for the idea is genuine, or whether it is actually some kind of a reverse-psychology defence mechanism to mask their fear of being discarded from the realm of power, what is imperative for all leaders to know is that such things are not matters to be taken lightly with little or no regard to the consequences of one's utterances.

Make such statements without sincerity and one may risk losing one's credibility should one decide not to hold true to one's words. Worst of all, one may ignite disunity among the constituents, when speculation, lobbying and jostling for the job intensifies upon such statements being carelessly made.

More importantly, at a time when our country undergoes a period of transition, statements such as these may lead to misinterpretation and false presumptions.

While there are some leaders who should seriously consider handing the reins over to someone else, it certainly does not apply to everyone. There are a number of leaders who have done and are continuing to do very well.

In those circumstances, it certainly should not fall upon them to resign just for the sake of resigning.

If they are capable and they continue to have the dynamism and energy, and support from the people, they should continue with their duties and do what they do best.

They should not feel a need to resign simply to join the bandwagon or simply to avoid being the odd one out or being condemned for being "power hungry".

The truth is, leaders should be honest with themselves and they should have the absolutely essential quality of being self-critical.

When one is able to see one's limitations, weaknesses and failures along with one's qualities, abilities and achievements, then one would be able to evaluate one's self fairly.

One would not have to "leave it to the party (or the party president)" to decide whether to stay or to withdraw.

One will know on one's own just what more needs to be done and just when it would be time to call it a day.

And there would be no need to announce that one is willing to give up power. One will simply do so when the time comes. Unless and until such time arrives, or unless confronted with having to make such a decision, one should just go quietly about one's business without the need to reiterate one's willingness to go.

A true leader would not subscribe to the herd mentality and move in the direction of the winds. On the contrary, his decision will be based on what he himself feels is the best course of action, after carefully evaluating the circumstances.

Ultimately, his decision must be based on what brings most benefit and least harm to his constituents, supporters and followers, for indeed a leader must put the interests of his people above his own.

Having said all that, it is hoped the leaders would be able to honestly assess for themselves their position vis-a-vis the people they serve, and consequently arrive at a sound and responsible decision of whether or not they should remain or whether they should step aside to accommodate new leadership.

They must then take full responsibility in communicating this decision, one way or the other, and not merely say that they would leave it to others to have the final say.