

**What leadership?
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Many of the people in the news these days - and, by and large, that, of course, means BN politicians - really must have been smoking some pretty bad weed, as it were.

Indeed, it's as though, in their stupor, they'd been soliciting roadside snake oil merchants to get some modal - anything that's deemed mujarab - from how to come up with expensive and totally unconvincing, made-in-Thailand sex videos, to tall tales of infidelity that even a village idiot would find far-fetched and absolutely ridiculous.

Many of us, on the other hand, wish that, instead, they would spend their time - and our money - on more constructive, productive and, certainly, creative pursuits, like resolving the country's debt problems and really, genuinely, bringing down our crime statistics.

Indeed, we wish that they would do the job that they were put there for in the first place instead of just bumming around making mischief.

Unfortunately, many of them simply seem incapable of doing so.

Years ago, these jokers and miscreants could get away with their nonsense, principally because we were easily distracted and/or had short memories. Also, then these incidences were few and far between.

But now, as if caught in an epidemic of stupidity and crassness, over and over they go slip sliding away, convincing us that they are, seriously, absolutely useless and way past their sell-by date.

In this regard, I am reminded of the Italian thinker, Antonio Gramsci, a favourite writer of mine back in the old days I was an impoverished student.

While imprisoned by the fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini, Gramsci wrote his remarkable Prison Notebooks which, even today, remains a classic for many students of culture, media and politics.

It was through Gramsci's writings that I first came across the term 'hegemony', often loosely defined as 'leadership', although it describes more than that.

Be that as it may, to summarise, perhaps unfairly, Gramsci's use of this concept to theorise society, the concept of hegemony helps us to understand how regimes remain in power through the use of both force and persuasion, coercion and consent.

But what should interest us more is that, for Gramsci, hegemony is never permanent and there will be moments of crisis.

These happen when that leadership is no longer heeded, when, as Gramsci would put it, the old is dying and the young cannot be born.

Indeed, when the regime runs out of convincing, believable ideas. When it starts losing credibility.

It's a bit like a person going senile or, in Malay, nyanyuk, and nobody believing in him/her

any more. Yes, reminds us of one or two of the old guard who've been shooting their mouths off quite a lot lately, doesn't it?

Raining banana peels

If we look around us these days, we see one purported leader after another making an utter ninny of himself (or herself, if you throw someone like Shahrizat into this pack). It's as though, apart from the seasonal haze clouding our environment, it is raining banana peels for these idiots to slip on.

Thus making them look less and less credible as leaders. And more and more like buffoons.

Indeed, looking at events randomly, recently, there was, first, the PTPTN debacle. Like the petty schoolyard bully, the higher education minister, in an attempt to hit out at the opposition, who had suggested that free education would be possible with a regime change, decided to freeze the PTPN loans for Unisel students. Loans gathered from the taxes we pay, mind you.

Amid the uproar that ensued, the Selangor (Pakatan) government, in response, stood firm and took on the minister's dare and offered to sell off some of Unisel's assets to fund the students' education.

Clearly outmanoeuvred, and suddenly realising that his had been an extremely unpopular, indeed moronic, move, the minister - and PTPTN - relented, lifting the freeze. Already with egg on his face, he nonetheless refused to concede, let alone apologise, especially to the victimised students and their parents.

In one fell swoop, he managed to illustrate to the whole nation what an arrogant and vindictive decision this had been. And, at the same time, contribute even more to this ongoing crisis of BN leadership, this crisis of hegemony.

Then there was the spectacle of our BN politicians and Perkasa - such loving bedfellows - hitting out at Singapore diplomats for allegedly being part of the Bersih 3.0 rally. Most of us are already aware - and are rather sick - of this old, jaded tactic of trying to gain mass support through hitting out at a purportedly common, external 'enemy'.

The official stand then was that foreign diplomats shouldn't have been at the Bersih 3.0 rally, certainly not as 'participants'. But it later transpired that the Malaysian envoy in Australia, quite unfortunately perhaps, had also attended one of the the Bersih rallies there. And had been caught on tape responding to questions posed by a television crew.

Thus evidently contradicting this 'official' Malaysian stand. Thus making more of them lose credibility. Thus contributing more to the crisis of leadership.

Ever-changing crime statistics

Then also there's the ever-changing statistics on crime and crime prevention.. all in the space of a few days recently. With such contradictory announcements by the authorities, backed by a truly insensitive comment - by the home minister this time - that this is all merely 'perception', people invariably have become more than a little bit annoyed.

More so when the victims of such crimes, fearing that the police reports they lodge will come to nought, decide to use social media to alert people, to share their frightening

experiences with the wider public. These shared fears cannot be dismissed or contemptuously wished away by the authorities.

They are very real. And they also indicate, yet again, a loss of faith. It doesn't take a genius to see that when people no longer believe they are being protected; that they can be robbed, assaulted, raped, murdered, in broad daylight and in popular shopping malls, they begin to question the reliability of the agencies entrusted with maintaining law and order - especially the police.

And it doesn't help matters when these same boys and girls in blue are so quick to take action against peaceful marchers and demonstrators exercising their right under the Malaysian constitution. But evidently slow to solve real, very serious, crimes.

So, when there's no attempt at appeasement, no effort to address these fears and concerns but, instead, you meet these fears with derision, you - more specifically the home minister and other assorted jokers... I mean, leaders - simply contribute further to this crisis and, quite likely, the regime's downfall.

And no amount of BR1M money, tyre vouchers and other forms of handouts, all funded by our taxes, will resolve that feeling of being betrayed, that rising resentment.

That crisis of hegemony.

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