

Shepherding the shepherds
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Leaders are responsible to the people, just as shepherds are duty-bound to lead the flock from green pasture to green pasture.

Yet, many of those elevated to positions of leadership are shirking their duties and reaping the wealth of their nations, instead of preserving it or making it grow.

The top echelon in political power and those around them, najib and petrol price hike "coincidentally", get rich and richer, while the common people invariably suffer, left to eke out a subsistence living on harsh grounds and diminishing pastures: something that subsidy-deprived and price-hike hit Malaysians will be able to relate to.

Malaysian cabinet ministers continue to demand that the people tighten their belts and change their habits and way of life; but no minister seems to be taking this "well thought out" advice.

Despite repeated announcements of "austerity modes" and "control measures", ministerial salaries remain uncut and their "privileges" untouched.

Common practices continue. They still enjoy three-course meals during breaks in government meetings and expensive-suited public officials are chauffeured in luxury cars, high-flying helicopters and other means that can only empty public coffers.

Millions siphoned off

At the same time, millions of ringgit are siphoned out of "leaky" public projects. Which, as many justly believe, enrich those who ply the halls of power and their close confidants, all at the expense of the rakyat.

Consider for instance the problematic Shah Alam Hospital project, the azlanBakun Dam fiasco, the Ipoh-Padang Besar double tracking sinkhole and other "overpriced" and "mismanaged" public infrastructures.

It should be no surprise to the average citizen that the who's who among Malaysia's wealthiest will list scions of the political elite and their dotting cronies or sceptered royalty.

One need only look at what the latest list of the Forbes 40 richest Malaysians reveals, or just imagine what a discreet peek into the wealth of a certain Sarawak leader would show.

What we need is an effective means of reminding leaders of their duties to the people and nation, keeping them on their toes and stressing the gravity of the people's trust upon their heads and shoulders.

Eat the humble pie

They must eat the humble pie and remember that their duty is to serve, not to hijack.

As the French once told their king, rulers must stoop to roll themselves in the mud of public concerns, or risk their heads rolling off their collective shoulders.

In our day and age, however, the word revolution is evoked not with the guillotine blade, but with the ballot box.

The Muslim caliph and companion of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), the fierce general Umar al-Khattab, did the unthinkable when he removed family members and relatives from posts and positions, even in positions remotely related to the state.

None was allowed to be involved in state business dealings. However, this may be a bit too drastic for us to implement, in our day and age.

What we need is a more creative solution, similar perhaps to a tale of fantasy, written in a book of fiction.

The story tells of a faraway island, populated by merchants for whom only wealth held sway. Their only interest was in trade and currency, and in hiring mercenaries for security and servants for everything else.

Duty to the public

But their dilemma was this: who is to be their king?

Their answer was to hold an election, and their mercenaries closed down the borders to ensure no one took flight, since most people were reluctant to take on such a duty. Many would vote for the one they most hated.

But there was no guarantee that once elected, the King would concentrate on the wealth of the nation, and not accumulate his own.

Their answer was simple, yet elegant.

Once made King, the citizen's wealth and that of his relatives were stripped and pooled into the general treasury of the public. A tight audit was kept, with every cent diligently accounted for.

The King was then left to manage the kingdom during his term, at the end of which his wealth would be taken out and returned.

But there was a catch. The wealth returned would be compounded with how the nation performed under his tenure. If the nation prospered, so did the King; but if the country suffered, the King would have to pay for the nation's losses out of his pocket.

Such was their way of holding their King at ransom. Needless to say, the kings of those days made it their business to look after the welfare of the land and people.

Looking at how our local "kings" are treating our country's wealth - as if it is their own private domain - maybe it is time that we too implement similar measures to remind our leaders of their duties to the people and nation.

They must be made to see that their duty is to the public!

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