

Good governance remains a dream

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THE World Bank defines good governance as "epitomised by predictable, open and enlightened policy making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, the rule of law, transparent processes, and a strong civil society participating in public affairs".

If this definition is applied to any public sector organisation - government departments and statutory bodies in Malaysia - can you name one which would meet the standards required?

Sadly, none. And yet we continue to hear the same old phrases - "good governance"; "transparency and accountability"; "justice and fairplay"; "people's interests"; and in the recent past, "openness".

Are they cliches created for convenience or are they just tools of deception by our politicians? Are they serious

when they put these cliches in their speeches or are they being used to create a *sendiri syiok* feeling?

The way things are going and being done, "good governance" is an alien word and it won't take long for some tunnel-visioned leader to ban it as a "relic from the colonial past".

He or she would claim that it originated from what was the Great Empire and would come up with a ridiculous argument that "values from that country where they eat fish and chips is not suitable to ours, where rice and curry is the staple food".

To ensure that the anti-colonial message is driven home, those present in the rent-a-crowd audience, will give a thundering applause, giving some sense of respectability to an absurd thought

of a self-proclaimed nationalist. (Even the ISO standards have not been spared with the the United States being the bogeyman.)

Where do we go from here? A person no less than the Prime Minister has said he wants to know if something is wrong and that he will accept criticism.

He was quoted by the *Bangkok Post* as saying: "You want to speak the truth, by all means, I have no problem. You want to tell me something is wrong somewhere, tell me. Tell the leadership the truth. I am happy for people to help me see things that are not doing well."

Unfortunately, it appears that

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while he wants to be told what is wrong, those below him in government circles do not want to be told anything, resulting in the truth being withheld.

They want to continue giving the PM only the good news and what these people think will be music to his ears. They withhold information (read truth) and they want to give the impression that their ministries, states, departments and agencies are running without any hitches.

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The Auditor-General's report is an indictment of the nonsense in government departments but it's

business as usual - promotions, decorations and overseas trips.

And then there are the king-makers and the little Napoleons who seem to be intoxicated by power, and money to a certain extent.

They make the rules. Laws made by parliament are put aside and their own set of rules and regulations come into play. Who is there to question them?

A case in point is the Port Klang assemblyman Datuk Zakaria Mat Deros. After breaking a series of laws, he is touted as a "good leader".

The *mentri besar* says his services are still needed but for what? Showing the *rakyat* how to break the law and get away with it? How good can a leader be when he cannot obey simple laws of the land?

Where is the "good governance" factor? Where is the transparency? Where is the accountability? Where is the rule of law?

What we need is a firm hand to deal with them, irrespective of their colour, creed, position or the prefixes before their names.

We need to make examples of people in high places who misuse and abuse their power. Instead, we molly-coddle law-breakers and send the wrong message to the people.

Every right-minded citizen of this country will not condone anyone or any action which will reflect badly on society as a whole, but there are a few in power who think they can get away with everything they do - legally or otherwise.

Good governance starts at the first level of government - the local authority. But if even the budget is decreed as secret, what transparency are we talking about?

If a ratepayer cannot even know how much is spent on filling a pothole, anyone who propagates that "we are transparent" is lying through his teeth.

And yet, some of these liars demand to be addressed as *Yang Berhormat* or "Right Honourable". Not only are they doing injustice to the office they hold but also make a mockery of the terms of address.

No Punches Pulled

by R. Nadeswaran

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