



On the beat

WONG CHUN WAI
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

THE Prime Minister has certainly set things right by calling for a stop to billboards with his face on them.

Surely all of us know what Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim looks like, so there's no need to splurge taxpayers' money to compete with cosmetic ad models and tuition teachers along the highway.

Last week, he complained that while on his way to Alor Setar for a Hari Raya open house, he learned about the billboards featuring him all over the country.

The billboards, he said, had been erected by government departments using allocations

Revolting reverence

Inflated sense of self-worth is a malaise afflicting many of our dignitaries.

from the previous government.

Well, it doesn't matter if the money is from the budget of the past government. The bottom line is, there's absolutely no reason to use the money to serve our political leaders' narcissistic needs.

It's good that Anwar pointed out the money allocated for these billboards should be put to better use.

These government bodies must have presumed that they were doing the PM a favour and wanted recognition for their contributions by buying space on these billboards.

But it isn't just the PM who's glorified. There are billboards of other leaders including Cabinet Ministers, Chief Ministers, state executive councillors and elected representatives all over the place, too, sometimes, even on bus stands.

It's perfectly understandable if such billboards were part of an election campaign because voters need to be reminded of politicians' presence.

Then there are the banners put up during festivals to greet their constituents. They are certainly

acceptable, but please direct the contractors to remove them after the celebrations are over.

These banners invariably become eyesores, yet no one seems to take them down, not even the local authorities whose tasks include tearing down illegal advertisements.

But the heart of the problem about using public funds for billboards lies in the long standing bodek culture afflicting Malaysia.

It's unfair to just blame the civil service for wanting to gain favours from their superiors, including political leaders.

Pathetic as it may sound, some would have thought that putting up billboards would be a way to gain brownie points.

One writer aptly described this currying favour practice as "the greatest single organisational dysfunction within Malaysia's civil service, compromising the quality and integrity of management along with protection against corruption."

Strong words. Perhaps even out of line, but a new political culture is surely needed.

Our federal ministers, for a start, should direct government

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officials under their respective ministries to dismiss the practice of grand receptions when they attend meetings.

It's inexplicable why so many officials should stop work just to greet and smile at a minister, or their deputies for that matter.

Malaysians would also like to see ceremonies become short and precise.

It's criminal for civil servants and invited guests to be spending half the day attending unproductive events, which mostly entails listening to a VIP.

Ministers and their deputies are merely performing their duties and while we respect our leaders, nothing comes out of unnecessarily elevating the status of politicians.

For a start, some politicians can discard the need for travelling with an entourage; which often includes political hangers-on. It's nothing more than a grandiose display of self-importance.

The old politicians, or commonly known as party warlords, are the worst of the lot. They enjoy travelling in a convoy of Alphard and Vellfire vehicles, or their equivalents.

And certainly, the entitlement of police outriders and even council outriders, must stop. These ingratiating, servile culture and pompous, egotistical practices must cease.

Then, there are those who insist that their titles must be properly addressed or else they'd be offended.

I've said enough of our rituals of addressing every Tan Sri, Puan Sri, Datuk Seri, Datin Seri, Datuk Datuk and Datin Datin. That's practically everyone in the room.

Our obsession with titles and honorifics to earn respect and public standing has really gone overboard. Too many people are flaunting titles they don't deserve.

No wonder there are Malaysians who are freely parading titles even if it's an offence.

The PM started his political career in the 1970s, insisting that he should be addressed as just Saudara Anwar Ibrahim.

We need a fresh political culture where YBs are elected to do their work and not expected to be revered.