

Tunku's Timeless principles — Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin
Malay Mail Online
2 June 2017

JUNE 2 — Getting celebrities to endorse a political campaign is an understandably attractive strategy for politicians. Advertisers pay tens of thousands for social media posts, reaching hundreds of thousands of followers and undoubtedly more if the post is shared and goes viral in other platforms.

It is usually a plus when the politician is able to show that they have support from diverse sets of constituencies (only racial supremacists might feel they only need a narrow base): If other citizens who share the same traits as you publicly endorse a product, you might be more likely to give it a try.

Another strategy for a politician is to actually become a celebrity. But it is important to appear authentic. Too much stage management and you might get caught out.

Recently the popular Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was accused of planning an apparently spontaneous jog, with his official photographer conveniently positioned at a certain point of the route where students were coincidentally hanging out.

If it appears that PR stunts are being used to divert attention from bad policies, the long-term consequences could be worse. And don't appear too elitist: The perception of Hillary Clinton being too close to Wall Street as well as Hollywood is cited as a contributing factor in her defeat.

In Malaysia today, many politicians on all sides are in the midst of navigating exactly the same territory, employing well-paid firms to ensure that they strike the right balance.

But it is rare for a long dead politician to attain celebrity status. That phenomenon is reserved for statesmen, and a result of genuine affection, for there is little political capital to be gained for supporting a dead politician (unless, perhaps, they have descendants currently active in politics). And it is no bad thing if this popularity is used to disseminate the principles exhibited by that statesman.

Dialog: The Thoughts on Tunku's Timeless Thinking features many celebrities commanding hundreds of thousands of followers. But reading Harith Iskander's interview, or Altimet's specially-written lyrics, or the thoughts of *Ola Bola's* actors, there is a genuine affinity for what Tunku Abdul Rahman represented.

But perhaps more impressively (and impossibly for any living politician), the book has united people from across the political spectrum, with two Umno veterans balancing two elected representatives from the federal opposition in the book. Distinguished

Malaysians who have contributed in the fields of law, sport, music and art complete the list.

As I wrote in my foreword:

“Not many politicians talk about principles today. When they do, it is often for lip service or so obviously contradictory to actions and policies that it only lays bare the hypocrisy of the speaker.”

Examples might be when politicians talk about the importance of unity and moderation, but at the same time promote racial supremacism; or when leaders wax lyrical about anti-corruption efforts but then take efforts to stymie investigations of corruption into funds with which they might be connected.

Perhaps the most profound declaration of Tunku Abdul Rahman’s principles is in his own personal crest, featuring the word *dibebaskan*: “freed,” or “liberated.” His commitment to freedom, liberty and democracy is repeated constantly before *Merdeka*, during the declaration of independence of the Federation of Malaya itself, again on Malaysia Day, and then for decades after in his writing.

At the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs we have tried to demonstrate that the Tunku’s principles were consistent with the rule of law, individual liberty, limited government and free markets.

These ideas can be found across many societies and civilisations in history, including during the Islamic Golden Age and in the Sultanate of Malacca.

These principles seek to protect the rights and maximise the freedom of all individuals in society, and therefore endeavouring to apply these principles is quite different to the pursuit of self-aggrandisement, typically through the hoarding of money or power.

Leaders who pursue the latter will not care about the consequences of their actions on other people, or on national institutions that were designed to protect citizens. In the worst case scenarios, institutions can be so utterly damaged that they lose their independence and become subservient to personal or party interests.

Malaysian politics would be much more honest if political leaders were clear about their principles. Unfortunately, it often seems that the pursuit of power is the overriding factor for too many of them.

Certainly there is a wealth of evidence to show that the Tunku was a great believer in democracy: for this there is ample evidence in his policies, speeches and articles, extracts of which are being commented upon throughout *Dialog*. All those aspiring to lead our democratic nation should learn much from these.”

Dialog: Thoughts on Tunku’s Timeless Thinking is available in book stores.

** Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin is founding president of IDEAS.*

**** This is the personal opinion of the writer or publication and does not necessarily represent the views of Malay Mail Online.**

Copyright © 2017 Malay Mail Online

Source: <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/what-you-think/article/tunkus-timeless-principles-tunku-zain-al-abidin>