

OPINION

Resignation, the missing culture in Malaysian politics

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In Malaysia, politicians often blame others when a crisis happens, even in the face of enormous evidences against them. Growing calls for these politicians to resign would constantly be ignored.

In 2008, Datuk Zaid Ibrahim resigned from Tun Abdullah Badawi's cabinet as the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, due to disagreement on the use of the now abolished Internal Security Act (ISA) on MP Teresa Kok, blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin and reporter Tan Hoon Cheng.

It was considered a groundbreaking step in Malaysia's political history, as it sets a precedent of what responsible politicians should do in the best interest of the people.

To admit one's mistake and to resign are, however, not part of the culture of politicians in this part of the world, although they show a politician's accountability to the public.

In Japan, it is common for a politician to resign. Over the years, four prime ministers, Shinzo Abe, Yasuo Fukuda, Yukio Hatoyama and Naoto Kan have resigned over the issue of unpopularity and national crises.

There is no agreement on why Japanese prime ministers are fragile and unstable. But most observers regard their act of resigning is part of the values of integrity, honour, respect and saving face in Japanese culture.

Come to think of it, if these traits are significant to Japanese culture, then could the same not be applied to Malaysian culture?

Most of the time Malaysian political leaders have no second thought about stepping down, despite immense pressure by the public for their exit.

Let's take another example, South Korea. The voluntary resignation of Chung Hong-won as prime minister over the recent ferry disaster might not come as a surprise to the Koreans.

The tragedy could have been blamed on the transport minister or the owner of the ferry company, but the prime minister took the responsibility.

MH370 has been missing for several months now with 229 passengers on board, but no one has been accountable. Not one has taken responsibility for the incident.

Our leaders choose to remain silent when things get out of hand, and some take the opportunity to sensationalise issues for their personal interests.

In all these and many other issues that have led to the decline of public confidence, no leader has resigned as a way of taking responsibility.

There are many reasons why public office holders in Malaysia do not normally take full responsibility for their failures in carrying out their duty.

One explanation is power obsession. Political leaders are obsessed with political power, which they abuse to serve their personal interests.

It could also be the absence of a relationship between responsibility and behaviour, as much as it is a dilemma of value and culture of leadership.

In short, their personal interests supersede their public responsibility. Many politicians seem to think that the public would eventually forgive and forget after they are given aid and goodies each year.

Well, they could be very wrong and it is time to impose the culture of resignation. – July 7, 2014.

** This is the personal opinion of the writer or publication and does not necessarily represent the views of The Malaysian Insider.*