

Time for leaders to heed the call

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Bob Dylan's 1964 song, 'The Times They are A-Changin'', is one of the most famous protest songs ever written, influencing a generation about leadership. Although the song articulates the hopes of the 60s generation, this generation is no different.

We are experiencing a tsunami of change in our politics, economics, as well as in religion and world affairs. In such a challenging period, the citizens need strong leaders to lead them in the right direction.

Unfortunately, those in power often neglect important values. Many abandon the leadership ideals for the rewards of power, money and influence.

Most recently, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was criticised on social networks especially Facebook over his statement that the people were not grateful when the price of kangkung went down.

Najib questioned why his administration was blamed whenever there was price increase but not complimented when goods become cheaper.

“When prices of things go up, everything goes up, including sawi and kangkung. There are times when the prices of vegetables go up and down... Today I read in the newspaper that the prices of some things which have dropped. The price of kangkung increased before this and now it has gone down,” said Najib.

Ironically, what Najib described is also applicable to his own administration.

The political legitimacy of his administration has sharply gone down since the 2008 polls and the situation has worsened after the 2013 polls.

Although the higher popular support for the opposition does not count due to the first-past-the-post system, it is undeniably a strong indication that something is wrong, and sadly, Barisan Nasional does not seem to learn even after the May 2013 election.

Where have all the leaders gone? Where are the principles?

The discourse on leadership is usually done in a top to bottom perspective.

Old leaders and leadership of the past are not sufficient to meet the demands of the current environment. Yes, they are seasoned politicians. They are also good in playing politics.

However, one must realise that information today is just a click away. The world is characterised by unprecedented complexity, paradox, and unpredictability. Change is rapid and constant.

Politicians today face increasing demands unlike those in the past. They should not rule the country with the old tactics.

This applies to how the authorities handle protests. Kuala Lumpur deputy police chief Amar Singh Ishar Singh alleged that protestors of the Gerakan Turun Kos Sara Hidup (Turun) wanted to use weapons, including grenades, to spark unrest. Such an allegation is similar to the allegations of unrest and the use of weapons in 2011 during the massive Bersih 2.0 rally, when the police claimed to have found parangs and Molotov cocktails two days before the rally, yet those responsible were never identified.

Surveys indicate that public perception on the government's credibility has improved since May 2013. The challenge now is for a new type of leader and leadership, indeed an entirely new and different way of thinking about leadership and about developing future leaders.

As Bob Dylan said:

Come senators, congressmen

Please heed the call

Don't stand in the doorway

Don't block up the hall

For he that gets hurt

Will be he who has stalled

There's a battle outside

And it is ragin'

It'll soon shake your windows

And rattle your walls

For the time they are a-changin'.

Malaysians are smarter now and they demand reformed politicians alongside the changing political landscape. They are no longer complacent. A true leader should realise and accept that. - January 20, 2014.

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