

Stop this political circus, we don't need the clowns

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RECENTLY, a friend told me that the circus is no longer a popular entertainment in his country.

I replied that I could appreciate why given the difficult economic situation we are facing today.

The circus as a wholesome family outing can be an expensive treat. With a cynical smile, he was quick to quip: "Not that. The politicians have now taken over! Though it lacks professionalism and finesse, it is free."

The real circus is out of business for now, came the punch line.

In silence, I smiled back politely. It sounded rather familiar, especially of late. Our version might still be a sideshow type of circus, but it is bad enough, considering it has the potential of developing into a full-fledged three-ring circus as more and more surprises are unveiled each day.

Indeed, surprise is an important element in a comedy that usually characterises a good circus. Unfortunately, not many are laughing any more. The comedy has gone stale as frustration takes over, engulfed by the feeling of betrayal in the trust placed on politicians.

This frustration may not be totally unexpected if we go by the Business Ethics Institute of Malaysia's (BEIM) survey carried out as recently as 2006.

Politicians were placed in the last but one position in the list of 15. This is again reflected in an on-line survey conducted by a national newspaper. While surveys and rankings of this nature are not completely reliable, politicians seem to have total faith in it as demonstrated in their reactions to university ranking, for example.

Herein lies the stark hypocrisy. While the universities are unreservedly taken to task for their allegedly "poor" performance, at times unfairly so, the politicians never seem to care a hoot about their own performance in the public eye.

Given the display of antics, rhetoric and theatrics daily, one would not be surprised to see that the image of the politicians will continue to suffer, if not worsen, if a similar poll is conducted today.

As elected representatives of the people, they seem to have failed collectively in lifting up the political etiquette of the country, and showing an iconic leadership that could inspire the younger and future generation of this country. The gutter politics based on an-eye-for-an-eye, which a leader like Mahatma Gandhi said would leave the world blind, are still very much the dominant practice today.

There is no clear magnanimity or the greatness of heart in trying to settle even the most trivial of issues although they make a "circus" of the country's political situation.

It is as though they do not care if they are the laughing stock of people around the world.

In one instance, someone was seen holding a placard "The world is watching." Yet, no one around the person holding the placard was bothered with the message, as they carried on washing dirty linen in public, even though every day we read about how difficult the future will be economically, and that the worst is still to come.

Some are already predicting that it will soon be RM4 to the US dollar, if the confidence in the US economy picks up soon and ours does not follow suit. The question is, of course, how we can restore confidence if our political situation continues to be in a messy limbo.

In fact, the contrary would be true as the state of uncertainty deepens, causing the community to feel threatened and the crime rate increases. Unemployment has risen with the shutting down of factories as a result of the economic collapse fuelled by the lack of proper and serious governance, which seems to be the case ever since the last general election was over.

One gets even more threatened when reminded that the current economic crisis is an emerging tsunami of sorts, and not a virtual reality game with limited damage. The only way out for now depends very much on the kind of political intervention carried out. Yet, reading through the accounts of the Great Depression, to which the present-day situation is often compared with, "one is struck by how politicians, policy makers and regular people were caught off guard by the severity of the events that would engulf them", warned an article in the *Asia Wall Street Journal* (March 4). What's more, when they are being distracted by daily sideshows that have devastating economic consequences.

So, it is time to say enough. It is about time to go back to serious governing. It is time to live by the rule of law as the politicians often champion. Yes, enough is enough, the political circus is over. We do not need the clowns anymore.

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