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### Moral authority of a state



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**TRUSTWORTHINESS:** The govt must be on the side of the people to protect their rights

THE idea of moral authority of the state has been in the discourse of philosophers, scholars, politicians and the citizenry through the ages. To understand justice, people in leadership positions must study the nature of moral authority itself.

Ignorance of leaders regarding trust and accountability is the foundational error that will lead to transgresses. In all matters, evil, ego, pride, shortsightedness, lack of restraint and wisdom lead to the championing of issues of discord.

The principles of moral authority are based on fundamental truths, which are immutable. Typically, religious institutions, more than state, claim rights to moral authority.

The moral authority of the state is founded on the sacred values of religion which command believers to take the straight path, respect other people's rights and faiths. It is also founded on the universal values of humanity, exemplified by the universal declarations of rights. Universal values of truth, justice, equality, freedom, beauty, goodness and the common good build moral authority and the social contract between state and citizens.

As civilisations move from empires to kingdom and to nation, understandings of the nature and relationships of individuals, society and state change. The contemporary emphasis on civil society is moving the primacy focus on the individual and state to the focus on society.

This move is underpinned by the acknowledgement that the state does not know everything and most governments do wrong to their people.

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When states give rights to corporations, to be the same as citizens but without the responsibilities that ordinary citizens have, states begin to lose their moral authority.

Individuals have moral authority, which is applied to conscience. Corporations with profit motives do not necessarily have moral authority or conscience.

In a democracy, moral authority is trust of a government. In an electoral constituency, truth is expected from the elected representative as well as the contenders.

When a government is formed, the people expect truth all over the land from the government and its representatives, as well as from the opposition. If there is loss of trust and faith in elected representatives or government, then there is loss of moral authority.

Widespread loss of trust and faith is a grave indicator of a failed democratic system. The United States lost its moral authority when people learned of conspiracy, hidden agenda, fraud and other national and international transgresses.

Smaller states must not make the same mistake. A mature team of leaders in a successful state comprises a circle of virtue who would influence each other on the path to "enjoin the good and prohibit the wrong".

Worldwide, daily, there are many examples of transgresses against the ordinary citizen, particularly the disadvantaged, those unable to defend their rights because of poverty, lack of resources, ignorance or other kinds of disabilities. When leaders go beyond the limits of their power or authority, they lose the balance of wisdom and doing the right thing for the common good.

A ruling elite with a small majority can do the right thing by upholding the moral authority that inheres in the institutions of state. When the state allows the injustices to occur, the state loses its moral authority and leaders lose their credibility. By its moral authority, the state must be on the side of the citizens to protect and promote their rights against transgressors, whether corporate bodies or powerful individuals or groups.

The tragic drama of civil disobedience in Egypt, Thailand and Ukraine reveal the complexity facing governments which lose moral authority when the decrees of the state are in contrary to moral pursuits of individuals and communities. The case of Ukraine is when there is the banning of public protests; Thailand is about corruption; and Egypt about overextending state authority on all persons.

On the assumption that the state adheres to higher moral authority, and is the provider of security, education and other important social institutions, Socrates argued that citizens must obey and endure the commands of the state.

On the other hand, with the historical experience of injustices of slavery, apartheid and discrimination, Martin Luther King Jr took the following stand: "An individual who breaks the law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty... in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law."

Who champions the moral authority of the Malaysian state? What would be the consequences to champions of the law, ethics and conscience of persons and society, who are non-consenters to unjust state decrees?

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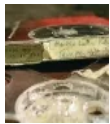
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