

## COMMENT

# Good leadership begins at local level

## GROUNDWORK FOCUS:

People-centric leadership starts at the local level and that's where grads can play a part

**T**HERE are now millions of university graduates in Malaysia and the number is growing. It is assumed that university graduates have ideas and know what is going on around them and in the world.

Many local-level leaders are university graduates. If they had been elected or nominated to state- or Federal-level positions, they would have to think big and act in long-term strategic ways.

Just because they become leaders at the local level, does not mean that they have to lower their sights, downgrade the level of their thinking and imagination to minimal proportions.

University graduate leaders at the local level in Segamat, Nilai, Taiping, Jitra, Sri Aman and Sem-

porna have the same common-sense competencies as their peers at state and federal levels.

In fact, local level leaders should have visions for the local realms. They can serve their constituencies and future generations more directly and more practically. Local leaders can initiate leadership acts ranging from small, beautiful, practical things to large, important and world changing possibilities.

When a little town is beautiful in so many significant ways, people will want to visit again, whether it is the hot springs, the mountain walk or the river boat ride.

Food lovers will remember the clean eateries that served *asam pedas*, *rojak*, *mee mamak*, *nasi padang*, *beriani*, *tomyam*, *Hailam mee* or *Cantonese kwayteow*.

There are a thousand and one initiatives that local leaders can take during their leadership watch. There are things that are necessary but not yet in existence that they can establish. There are also institutions that are in existence that they could support and improve.

At the centre of many kampung, villages and towns are always schools, colleges and universities. However small and isolated these institutions are, they will produce great alumni as the pride of the community.

Then, there are the local hospitals or clinics that people may have to visit at some point of time, for one reason or another. There will be local places of worships, mosques, temples, churches and well-maintained cemeteries.

There may be the town clock tower and other memorable landmarks. Local town planners, landscape planners and other decision-makers must be meticulous and have an eye for detail, an eye for uniqueness, an eye for beauty in all ways, and nooks and corners of the ecology and architecture of the township. The vision of the quaint township should be to be equal to the best in the country or elsewhere in the world.

Not to have such vision and follow through plans, would be to shortchange or even betray the people. Not to be such change-

masters means to diminish the dynamism and force of local leadership who become mere followers of federal- and state-level leaders who are in reality concerned with matters that may not bring changes to the immediate localities.

Local authorities can ensure the following amenities and facilities are made available and improved during their watch, not wait for approval of federal or state authorities before exercising their imagination and leadership:

**INTERNET** cafes, bookshops and libraries;

**CIVIC** halls, theatres, exhibition halls and music studios;

**SPORTS** hall, recreation centres and swimming pools;

**POPULAR** restaurants and food-courts with food safety procedures;

**PHARMACY**, Chinese medical halls and traditional medicine centres;

**EMERGENCY** help centres;

**SCIENCE**, language, arts and crafts centres for the growth of potentialities of people across the ages;

**HIGH** maintenance culture of cleanliness of public sanitation and waste disposal; and,

**EXCELLENT** public transport and road safety.

Local leadership determines the

renewal of the town slum areas and the planting of beautiful roadside trees and gardens everywhere. They establish institutions and care for the elderly and sick and provide support for youth.

Real people-centric leadership year-long is at the local level. Local leaders make people understand that low-cost housing is temporary-transitions, and people have to improve their lot and move for better housing.

Federal and state leaders have frequently blamed local leaders for being slow, unimaginative, complacent and unwilling to change. It is time for local leaders to be visible and demonstrate visionary local leadership with knowledge acumen, positive values and will, equal to those at all other levels.

Local initiatives and creativity can be so compelling that the larger towns in state and federal territories, and, other cities elsewhere will want to learn from the exciting local models.

It is a blind spot in development and understanding to think that great leadership comes only from the centre. Great leadership is always rooted firmly on local communities and realities.

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