

COMMENT

Citizens must be politically literate

AWARENESS: They will understand the consequences of their votes

POLITICAL literacy is a set of competencies citizens should master in order to participate effectively and meaningfully in government. The abilities of political literacy encompass understanding on how a government works and the important issues facing society in the short- and long term.

As citizens exercise their rights, it is necessary that they do so critically, mindful that their decisions will have consequences.

Political literacy is related to other literacies, including economic literacy, historical literacy, cultural, religious literacies, and even aesthetics literacy. Organisations interested in participatory democracy are concerned about the levels of political literacy in their societies.

Acquisition and development of other literacies enable citizens to be critical based on facts, concepts, information, and thinking cultures, which enable the exercise of critical thought and vision. Values

enable visions to be measured against the rightness of logic and kindness of the human heart. Political literacy then must be accompanied by other core literacies in a democratic society.

Besides the national elections and by-elections, a referendum is one of the most important means of determining the wishes of the people. Malaysia was founded based on the referendum.

Crimea had a controversial referendum to stay with Ukraine or to join Russia. Based on the majority of votes in favour of joining Russia, Crimea has applied to join Russia. Opponents have labelled the situation as "the annexation" by Russia. In the first Iraq war, Iraq was accused of "annexing" Kuwait in 1990.



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This year, Scotland will hold a referendum for independence. The consequences of the referendum are so great that Scotland has embarked on a programme to enlighten people in political literacy.

Under ordinary and extraordinary circumstances, the vote can be considered sacred. The right to vote and the thinking process that leads to choice and the exercise of the vote must have clarity.

For various reasons, political man continues to destroy his human heritage: the library of Iraq, the museums and artifacts of Syria



People walking past a statue of Lenin in Yalta, Crimea. All votes, be they for the local, state or national government, have **international consequences**. AFP pic

or the Bamiyan Buddhist statues in Afghanistan.

Underlying the destruction is ignorance and lack of profound understanding of the long human journey and the hard-earned milestones of the human heritage.

Insights from thinking leaders

contribute to profound understanding of leadership and political literacy, as exemplified by the following observations:

LEADERSHIP has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together — Jesse Jackson;

THE highest proof of virtue is to possess boundless power without abusing it — Lord Thomas Macaulay;

ONE measure of leadership is the calibre of people who choose to follow you — Dennis Peer;

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