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Time to come down hard on social-cum-political distancing



By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - June 16, 2020 @ 5:44pm



Protesters gather at the Seattle Police Department's West Precinct after marching from the police-free zone known as the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP) in Seattle, Washington. -AFP pic








THIS is the raw lesson that comes from US President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" philosophy. It revolves around the avoidable tragic deaths of George Floyd and Ahmaud Aberry, which occurred barely a few months apart. The former was due to suffocation choked by the knee of the alleged killer pressed against the victim's neck.

The latter, when the victim was "hunted down" and shot to death. Both victims were black males, while the ones causing the deaths were white

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remain indoors in order to stay safe, and by so doing so, hope to flatten the curve. Not surprisingly, no one took to the streets or public spaces to protest – although blacks are relatively most affected. In contrast, most places turned into ghost-towns following the lockdown for several weeks. Still, there was no mass violence despite the brewing of deep emotions all round.

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Slogans like "Black Lives Matter" or similar taglines are visibly absent. People seem more anxious and concerned with "testing" as a strategy to manage the deadly spread of Covid-19. Physical distancing, face masks, and washing hands are their immediate preoccupations. Occasionally, some voices of anger were heard but directed to the lack of supplies like personal preventive equipment (PPEs).

There was no marked panic. And lives went on regardless, slower but steady. Personnel from the medical and health sectors were the life-savers working endlessly as frontliners earning huge respect as "heroes" of the people, as was the case everywhere else. Blacks are significant among them

However, the narrative triggered by the death of the two black Americans is hugely different by all counts. First, it resulted in massive demonstrations among ordinary citizens of all colours, including the whites! If the virus drives people indoors, here is exactly the opposite. Larger crowds spilled into the streets as days passed by to collectively express their deepest rage in multiple cities from coast-to-coast.

The predominant slogan seems to be "Black Lives Matter" – underscoring the long standing emblematic issue of racism and police brutality mainly impacting people of colour. So deep is the anger that there were widespread protests, mixed with violence, looting, major damages and



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public (mis)behaviours on safe distancing given the groundswell of "dissatisfied" individuals from all walks of life. Worse is the apparent political distancing between the contending parties and their related ideologies.

So much so, the US President stands accused of playing the race and religion cards in the effort to boost popularity as the presidential election draws closer. He also threatened to bring in the military resulting in mounting tensions.

Against this backdrop, the world looked on with bewilderment. Meanwhile, the sentiments spread to other nations as well. Most are still puzzled as to what has befallen the world's supposedly most mature democracies and powerful economies.

What is amiss? That the slogan "Black Lives Matter" stands out singularly for decades, even when a president of colour was in office for two terms before this, seems to suggest that "justice" is not synonymous with democracy and economics American-style.

Perhaps this explains why the situation deteriorated further. More baffling, as though "lives" per se does not matter as the numbers of Americans who died from Covid-19, no less violently, reached six-digits and counting.

It is equally violent when more lives could have been spared if only the policies and decisions taken by the leadership were coherent, apolitical, non-divisive and more human-centric – fairly applied across the country. It is even more violent when the whole country is caught unprepared without the most basic of needs like the adequate supply of PPEs, test kits, ventilators – indeed, the ecosystem as a whole as reportedly warned more than a decade ago by Bill Gates.

America may be proudly more than ready to fight tangible (conventional) wars given the trillions spent for this. But it performed pathetically for the intangibles as exposed by the Covid pandemic involving invisible "enemies." This includes racism, brutality and the social-cum-political distancing platforms.

Invariably, they lead to more isolation, disunity and disagreement, thus opening the doors wide for the coronavirus to play havoc. Simply put, racism is the "real" virus that must be first eliminated before the Covid-19 pandemic can be halted for good. Therein is the key takeaway for humanity to reflect and act upon by coming down hard on the practices of social and political distancing!

The writer, an NST columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Straits Times

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