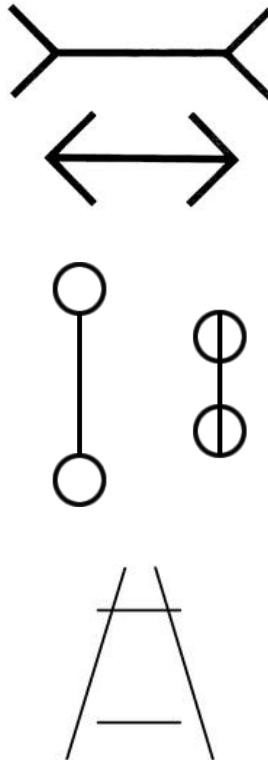


Perceptions, Illusions & Reality

Propaganda and illusions of reality

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Please observe the following pictures:



You would agree that in the top picture, the upper horizontal line is longer than the lower; in the middle picture, the left vertical line is longer than the right; and in the bottom picture, the top horizontal line is longer than the lower.

But, let me assure you that if you measure the lines, they are exactly the same length. The above three pictures are commonly referred to as the **Muller-Lyer illusion** and is one of the most famous of illusions. It was created by German psychiatrist Franz Muller-Lyer in 1889.

Now that you know for a fact that the lines are exactly the same length, yet whenever you look at the three pictures, you or rather your mind refuses to acknowledge ***the reality that the lines are of the same length***. Try as hard as you can, your eyes ***refuse to acknowledge the reality***.

What has this got to do with political propaganda?

Let me explain.

Whenever we make a judgment, conclusion and or a decision, we are often affected by what we see and intuitively we make a hasty decision **because we believe that our eyes don't lie**. This is even so, when as stated above, the lines are of the exact same length, our eyes somehow refuse to accept the reality and **this "refusal" persists to the extent that we refuse and or fail to rectify this apparent error**.

Look at the three pictures again and did your experience not confirm what I have stated?

You can see how stubborn we can be in not acknowledging **the reality**.

Once we have made a major decision solely on the basis of an observation (as in the case above) we find it very difficult to change our mind or our decisions, even though we know that it is wrong. Call it "ego", "stubbornness" or whatever, but it is the sad reality that we often cling on to this illusion.

Now let me apply the Muller-Lyer illusion to politics, specifically propaganda in politics.

Let us now analyse the idiotic stance of one of our politicians from the Opposition coalition, Mr. Karpal Singh and his judgment, decision and or conclusion that he must oppose Hudud come hell or high water. He perceives himself as the champion of the secular society and has said that Hudud can only be implemented over his dead body. Such bravado!

But, what is the reality?

Obviously, if two-thirds of the members of parliament were to legislate that Hudud be implemented, there is nothing Karpal Singh can do about it, more so when he is dead and buried. Some would even say – good riddance!

Again, who is Karpal Singh to insist that members of PAS who are Muslims have no right to promote and or even demand that Hudud be implemented as part of their political agenda? It is the religious belief of the PAS members that as Muslims, they must implement Hudud, no matter how galling it may be for Karpal Singh.

Likewise, who are we to judge Karpal Singh as a deviant and a traitor to his religion for not wearing a turban as is required of all those who profess Sikhism as their faith?

So, Karpal Singh persists in making an issue out of Hudud regardless of the political reality. He refuses to accept the reality that Hudud can only be implemented if two-thirds of the members of parliament decide to amend the Constitution as it is their democratic right. But, on this issue, this man comes across as if only he and he alone has the final say on this issue. Karpal Singh is in fact using an illusion to promote **his own political agenda, even though it would be detrimental to the cause of the Opposition coalition. He cares not for the reality that his opposition to Hudud has no political basis. He is**

in fact a scaremonger, creating frightening illusions of religious perversion.

But, we have yet to hear his stand on the death penalty or whipping, and even if he had made a stand on those issues, it was not articulated with the same intensity as his stand on Hudud.

Qui bono? Who benefits from this scare tactic? And, it is most pronounced whenever an election draws near.

A non-issue is made into a major issue distracting the electorate from focusing on more urgent issues.

What and whose interest does Karpal Singh serve? You, the voter will be the judge.

Barisan Nasional must be extremely pleased by Karpal Singh's theatrics and rightly so.

Lest I be accused of being bias, I will now turn my attention on the Barisan Nasional and its recent stance on the BERSIH movement for clean and fair elections.

Let's revisit Abraham Maslow's famous maxim, "***If the only tool you have is a hammer, you are likely to perceive every problem as a nail ...***"

The approach by the Barisan Nasional government and the security forces suggest that any public gathering or demonstration not organised by them would be a threat to the status quo, especially when it is a huge gathering. And, as Maslow correctly pointed out that, if every problem is perceived as a nail, then the only solution is to use a hammer. In the case of the BERSIH movement, the sledge hammer was used!

A ten thousand police force marching in broad daylight may be perceived as a display of ***fascist power***, evidence of a police state. To others, it is with pride that such ***a force exists to safeguard*** the community. Which is reality and which is the illusion?

A ten thousand strong gathering can be considered a threat or it may be a display of an exercise in democracy, of the freedom of association and the right to express one's views.

If our decision is based on mere perception and not on reality, a wrong approach may be adopted. The measurement is the same – ten thousand, but our perceptions may lead us to arrive at different approaches and judgments.

As in the Karpal Singh scenario, the end result was negative to the Barisan Nasional's cause.

There are times, when we can rely on intuitive judgments or decisions, but there are times, when our intuitive decisions must be verified by rational analysis of the overall situation.

Thus, having measured the lines and found them to be the same length, can we still insist that one is longer than the other? Surely not, and it behoves us that we re-examine our perceptions / options.

Therein lies the danger of political propaganda based on intuitive judgments and or decisions. We believe in our own propaganda even when it is proven to be wrong and harmful to our cause.

It is my hope that this short article will trigger some soul searching by our politicians and their spin doctors across the political divide. Is it too much to expect that they would in the future be more rational and less intuitive, be less emotional and apply more critical analysis?

The electorate is not stupid or irrational.

Elections are decided by no more than one or two major issues.

Right now, we have information overload. It is damn irritating, confusing and bloody jarring.

It is just too much noise and illusions, stupid!