



Lack of leadership heralds a shaky start to a new decade.

Four billion years after the Big Bang, the human race is still rather primitive despite all its symbols of sophistication. If evolution is leading us in a slow walk to perfection, the last decade was a big step in the wrong direction.

Other than to celebrate the end of what is easily the most depressing decade of this writer's life so far, there is precious little to feel good about the 2000s. Not much has happened socially. The impoverished half of the species, the suppressed half that is the fairer sex, are no better off than they were in the 1990s. Palestine, the cradle of modern civilisation and the trigger that threatens peace at every corner of the globe, has a new wall meandering through people's homes. Technologically, not much has happened except for some flashes of progress in medicine. Economically, the Internet bubble burst at the start of the decade and the even bigger global financial crisis brought the curtains down on it. Morally, we are approaching bankruptcy with religious leaders spreading hatred, political leaders bungling the biggest challenges of our times and business leaders selling their souls at the altar of the shareholder.

For this column, the moral bankruptcy in the Wall Streets of the world is perhaps the most noteworthy. Swept to power, even the new hope has lost much of his halo. Barack Obama must have realised, all too painfully, that Big Business has far too many powerful friends to allow meaningful regulatory changes in the financial sector. His other big promise, healthcare, has fallen way short of his aspirations with no public option for his people. The big insurance companies and the big pharmaceutical companies will continue to rake it in. Gordon Brown's efforts to promote a new culture in European banking have all but ground to a halt. And finally, Copenhagen became the symbol of the decade gone by. If the world indeed faces an existential threat, not too many seem bothered enough to actually do something about it.

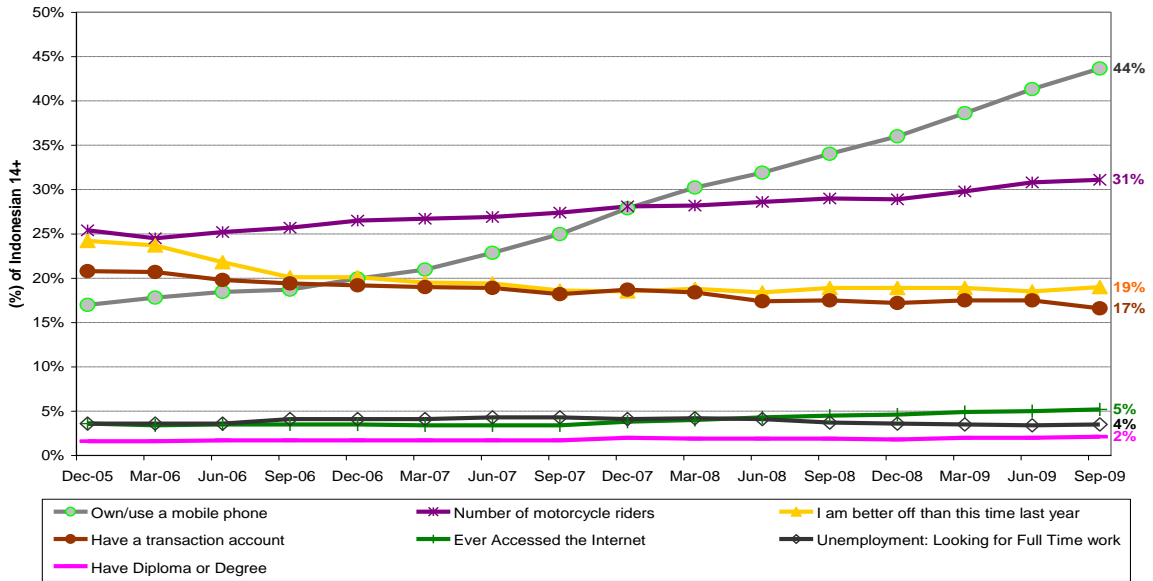
Inept. It is perhaps the most appropriate word that describes our leaders of today, across the different facets of life and around the globe. Their inability to decipher right from wrong remains a worrying sign for the 2010s. A lot of talk, very little action.

In Indonesia, the Bank Century saga continues to cast a long shadow, now straddling two decades. The nexus between money and power seems stronger than ever. Eight out of ten Indonesians believe that "if we don't act now we'll never be able to control our environmental problems". If you haven't heard of the *Gaia* principle, now is a good time to *Google* it. Did the Indonesian delegation give voice to the people who sent them to Copenhagen? The same number believe that "the gap between rich and poor is increasing". To give credit where it's due, this president seems concerned enough to address the vital issue of inequality. Actions taken by this administration have not only arrested the widening gap, it has helped to reduce it. Unemployment is not growing as it is in most countries, it is effectively heading in the right direction. Contrary to dated BPS data and Ministry of Manpower statistics, Roy Morgan Research has evidence to believe that only 4 per cent of the workforce is looking for full-time work today. That major indicator is gradually and visibly dipping but popular perception is lagging behind reality.

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WHERE IS INDONESIA HEADING IN THE 2010s?



That kind of progress will continue to spur the consumer economy. Today, almost 45 per cent of Indonesians has a cellular phone. Though the rate of growth is slowing down, market penetration continues to grow. One in three rides a motorcycle, a number that is racing ahead with women riding the wave. If the motorcycle which is used as a family transport is a symbol of the country’s growing middle-class, then the nation is indeed motoring ahead. The sobering reality is the price of consumer goods, with groceries constituting a major portion of the monthly domestic budget. It has had a dampening effect, with only 19 per cent believing “I am better off than I was the same time last year”. The pressure on the wallet has also led to the decline in the number of people with a bank account, down to 17 per cent from 21 per cent just five years ago. Higher bank fees has not helped.

While there is a growing number of people joining the fold, only 5 per cent of Indonesians have “accessed the internet”. The low level of usage is a symbol of contemporary Indonesia in contrast with its neighbours, held back from joining the new global economy. This is tempered with the continuing growth in the number of youth achieving diplomas and university degrees. At 2 per cent and growing, there will be more agents of change accelerating the modernisation of the economy. Whether they will be encouraged by business providing opportunities and government bringing about promised changes, is to be seen. The country is poised for growth, in much better shape than most economies around the world. The people are watching, with optimism. Will their leaders take them into the next decade with confidence, or will they be let down?

Roy Morgan Single Source is Indonesia’s biggest syndicated survey with over 25,000 respondents 14 years and older interviewed each year. Almost 90 per cent of the population is covered, from the cities, towns and villages around the country. The data is updated every 90 days.

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