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Official missions abroad reflect on a country

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad makes it a habit to include businessmen and entrepreneurs in his official missions overseas. The country's "Super Salesman" helps open doors to the businessmen, doors which otherwise will either remain close or take a long time to open.

The businessmen who are included in the official delegation led by the Prime Minister should make full use of the opportunities provided to them. As members of Dr Mahathir's delegation, they also represent the country.

As such, it is incumbent upon them to ensure that the good name of the country, and the Prime Minister, is not in any way jeopardised. They also have an obligation to fully participate in the official functions and business meetings that have been arranged by their hosts.

Often, the hosts go out of their way to organise meetings and functions only because of the Prime Minister.

Malaysia is greatly admired for what it has achieved so far. As the Lebanese Prime Minister Faric Hariri told Business Times in an interview in Beirut, he (Hariri) wished he could do what Dr Mahathir has done and achieve the same results.

Hariri, an ardent admirer of Dr Mahathir, is impressed with Malaysia's progress and development. It is almost a developed country, he noted, and very "disciplined".

According to Hariri's aides, he constantly speaks of Malaysia's achievements and Dr Mahathir's policies and contributions to Malaysia's development and the stature the country has achieved in the international arena.

Thus, it is important that the businessmen in the official delegation be equally disciplined and stick to the official agenda drawn up by the host. In most cases, the hosts would have gone out of their way to arrange programmes and meetings, setting aside many of their own urgent tasks and appointments.

It is not always easy to cater to the varying needs of a large delegation. One must bear in mind that for a country like Lebanon, which is still recovering from the devastation of 17 years of strife and war, the effort to cater to the needs of visitors, numbering about 100, is not an easy task.

Thus, the Malaysian businessmen in the delegation given the honour of being included in the Prime Minister's official delegation should also reciprocate by attending the meetings and functions so arranged.

They will not be doing the Prime Minister, the country nor their hosts, any justice if after being included as members of the official delegation, choose to go on their own, including sight-seeing and skipping some of the official meetings arranged for them.

If they want to go sight-seeing and explore the many tourist sites in a country like Lebanon - despite the war there are numerous interesting places that one can still find - they should make their own way, on their own time, and at their own pace.

Undoubtedly, the prosperity in Malaysia has resulted in many entrepreneurs able to own private jets, thus enabling many to fly to anywhere in the world, unrestricted by commercial airlines' schedules and unavailability of seats on Malaysia Airlines or other carriers.

It is not uncommon these days to find some chief executives taking their personal staff abroad on their private jets for a well-deserved break and

trip to "exotic places".

It is a way of showing their staff that their hard work and contribution are appreciated and that they also have in no small way contributed to the healthy and improved performance of the company.

Such gestures make the employees feel appreciated and goes a long way in raising the moral of the staff and employees.

However, there is a need to ensure that these appreciative gestures on the part of the chief executives towards their staff do not interfere with official functions and official trips of the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister.

It could give rise to many missed heartbeats and nightmares for the security personnel on duty especially when the "staff members" are not listed as members of the official delegation and security from both sides - that of the host country and Malaysia - do not know who they are.

Similarly, for the "staff" to suddenly turn up at an official function where the Prime Minister and members of his delegation are being hosted to lunch or dinner, places greater strains on the host and security.

Being good hosts, they will not complain but as visitors and guests, one should not take the hospitality and generosity of one's host for granted and impose a greater burden on them.

It is time Malaysians - businessmen, politicians and others - take stock of the situation and ensure that we are not labelled the "Ugly Malaysians" abroad.

It is important we do not take the hospitality extended to Malaysians, as part of the official delegation, for granted and think that we can do whatever we want in a foreign land.

If the chief executive officers want to reward their staff for their hard work, it is a good thing and should in fact be encouraged, but it should not interfere with official functions and certainly not with the official visits, be they by the Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister.

The chief executive officer should send the staff on separate holidays and visits, but if they want to include them when they (CEOs) are members of the Prime Minister's delegation and have seats available on their own private jets, and want to take their loyal and hardworking staff with them, the personal staff should not be seen at official functions.

They should have their own separate programme and agenda drawn up, perhaps even stay at a separate hotel and location, and not be seen at all at the Prime Minister's official functions so as not to interfere with the function and certainly not place a greater burden on the security personnel.

The security personnel undoubtedly already have their hands full taking care of the security of the VIPs and members of the official delegation.

It is important, at all costs, to ensure that the good name of the Prime Minister and the country are not jeopardised by the ill-conceived actions, no matter how well intended they are, of a small group of Malaysians.

There is much to be achieved by the businessmen and entrepreneurs by being included in the official delegation and they know it, or else they would not be eager to join the delegation.

As such, they should make the extra effort to ensure that they do not jeopardise their own chances and more importantly, tarnish the good name of the leader of the delegation - be it the Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister - and as members of the official delegation, they should keep the aims and objectives of the official mission in mind at all times.

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