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Staff's firmness a credit to MAS

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SHARIFAH Mastura has a China doll hairdo. This makes her look younger than she really is. I met her while she was on duty on MAS flight MH629 from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore.

It was April 2 and I was going to Singapore where I was catching the connecting flight to Kuwait.

Together with several other journalists from the country's print and electronic media, I was going to the Gulf state to cover the official visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to that country.

Sharifah Mastura, as she told all the passengers on board the aircraft, was the chief stewardess on that flight.

In the First Class cabin, she was assisted by a female colleague, Noraizan.

Both of them were all smiles and Noraizan particularly was very helpful.

The First Class was not fully occupied and so Noraizan had a rather easy time dealing with each passenger's needs.

It takes only 55 minutes flying time to reach Singapore's Changi Airport and some of us didn't partake of the light refreshments.

If not for the firm manner in which Sharifah Mastura handled a couple of passengers, it would have been an uneventful flight.

Beneath that fragile China doll exterior lay a firm professional trained to handle all kinds of situations.

On that flight, Sharifah Mastura's training was put to the test and she came through with flying colours.

It wasn't exactly a big problem but it needed to be handled politely and firmly.

A couple of tie-wearing Caucasian males had occupied two First Class seats on the left side of the aircraft. One of them had taken my seat, number 2A.

I didn't bother to ask him to move since the First Class cabin was not full. I had assumed that the two of them were friends and wanted to sit together.

I then proceeded to take the next vacant seat.

The two Caucasians were busy talking to each other and I was trying to figure out which country they had come from.

From the accent, I gathered they were Americans, probably businessmen on a business trip.

Quite a number of foreigners make regular trips to Malaysia for some reason or other.

Wearing white shirts and matching ties, they looked quite respectable in the usual businessman's style. The only thing was that on this occasion they were a little nakal (naughty) and decided to move from their seats in the Economy Class to those in First Class.

I suppose they must have been encouraged by the fact that the First Class cabin was not full and it was manned by two women, so to speak.

They might have done the same thing elsewhere and got away with it, which probably gave them the confidence to try it on this flight.

Well, Sharifah Mastura didn't want anything of this sort to trouble her flight. April 2 was the big MAS dinner to celebrate the airline's 50th anniversary.

I was invited to the dinner but was forced to miss it because of my assignment in Kuwait.

While many of her senior colleagues were enjoying the dinner which was graced by the Prime Minister and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Sharifah Mastura and others were performing their duties as usual.

Just before the flight took off, Sharifah Mastura approached the two Caucasians who were hiding behind two newspapers, busily pretending to catch up on the day's news.

It must have been their modus operandi - pretend to be busy and no one will bother you.

But Sharifah Mastura was not to be fooled. The passenger manifest showed only a certain number of passengers in the First Class cabin and the two were not on the list.

Sharifah Mastura wasted no time and approached them with a smile. In her own way, she told them that they should not be sitting in the front cabin and advised them to move back to their original seats.

The two Caucasians made a feeble attempt to stay put, but Sharifah Mastura argued that there were many unoccupied seats in the Economy Class section and they could sit wherever they liked after the flight had taken off.

More smiles and small talk later, the two Caucasians made their way back to their original seats.

I regard Sharifah Mastura's firm manner in handling what could be a tricky situation as a symbol of the airline's approach to their future businesses.

One has to assert one's authority if things are to be done effectively.

At the same time, one needs to maintain and make new friends, especially in a fiercely competitive field as the airline industry.

If MAS has more of such employees as Sharifah Mastura, then the airline should be able to ride whatever business turbulence it will face in the future.

On the occasion of MAS' 50th anniversary, I wish the airline's management all the best in their future undertaking.

My special greetings to individuals like Sharifah Mastura whose duties are no less vital to the airline's success. Syabas.

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