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No lessons learnt from all these tours abroad

Randhir Singh

SOME things in Malaysia are peculiar. One of which is this habit of going on study tours, more popularly known in Bahasa Malaysia as Rombongan Lawatan Sambil Belajar.

From Government departments to private agencies, they are all fond of sending delegates overseas with the noble intention of "learning".

Malaysian sport is no different, with numerous delegations being sent for practically every event around the world.

The latest was the just-ended Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. Sukom Ninety Eight, organisers of the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games, had sent a delegation to "study the accreditation and technology intergrated system".

Indeed, Sukom delegates have been busy since Malaysia were awarded the task of hosting the Games in 1992.

There was a large delegation to the 1994 Victoria Games and delegates have been travelling since, visiting cities including Harare, Hiroshima, Atlanta, Athens, Chiangmai and Jakarta.

Sukom are not alone. The Olympic Council of Malaysia and their affiliates, the National Sports Council, State sports councils and the Sports Ministry are also in the habit of travelling to "learn".

That most of them fulfil their lawatan agendas is not in doubt, judging from the hundreds of photographs snapped, the number of sites visited and the souvenirs they bring home.

But what remains uncertain is whether they belajar.

If Sukom, at this juncture are still learning how to organise the Games, then something is amiss.

Haven't they learnt anything from all their jaunts?

For it took Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to direct them and the Sports Ministry to hold pre-Games trials at the Bukit Jalil complex to test the facilities.

One would have thought Sukom would have it in their plan after all the overseas stints to learn how to organise the Games.

And talking of volunteers, didn't the Sukom delegation to Victoria learn anything?

Sukom admitted their mistake of training 40,000 volunteers when only 15,000 were needed. What a waste of time, effort and money to train the additional 25,000 volunteers.

But Sukom are not alone. Even the Ministry seem not to have learnt.

At the Main Stadium in Bukit Jalil security seems to have been given second place. Instead of centrally-controlled magnetic locks, which is the norm now to cope with emergencies, the Ministry decided on manual ones.

What would be the consequences in the event of an emergency?

The number of turnstiles too are few.

The 70,000-seater Shah Alam Stadium has 108 turnstiles while Bukit Jalil with a capacity of 100,000 has only 66.

The installation of scoreboards in practically every stadium is another shameful episode.

The exorbitant rates quoted by foreign companies were accepted by the Sports Ministry and the Treasury despite a local product at their doorstep.

Perhaps those countless individuals who had gone for those numerous study tours all these years were still so busy compiling their reports to

suggest to the powers-that-be that the trend these days is for the much-cheaper portable scoreboards.

The trend is also for retractable seats and not permanent ones.

It is much cheaper to have temporary fixtures which could be removed after the Games.

But somehow in Malaysia we tend to do things differently.

For instance Sydney, who will host the 2000 Olympics, are upgrading existing halls for indoor events but in Malaysia we build new halls or indoor stadiums.

We are about the only country who build separate stadiums for netball, lawn bowls and women's hockey.

Then we have the Langkawi shooting range which costs RM70 million, one of the most expensive in the world. Even after spending those millions, they didn't get it right, as one of the three ranges faces another.

Did any of the study trips include shooting ranges?

The Bukit Jalil hockey stadium, which was ready and came with a scorebaord, is another story.

The Ministry, in these trying economic times, decided to install another scoreboard and transfer the existing one to the adjacent pitch. But do you need a multi-million ringgit permanent scoreboard for a warm-up pitch?

All these sad stories are not new.

Remember, how the FA of Malaysia (FAM) sent about 40 State FA officials on a European tour to study the professional league and management of clubs prior to the introduction of professionalism in Malaysia.

There were two such tours costing more than a million ringgit but to this day State FAs are still unable to run their teams profesionally, what with salaries not paid on time and the tax man as well as EPF inspectors trying to collect as well.

But just when you think the time has come to stop all such tours, Sukom announced last week that they would be sending a delegation to London next month for the Queen's Baton Run.

Can you beat that!

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