

18/01/1998

Sports Ministry need to heed austerity call

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LOVE MALAYSIA, Buy Malaysia. The Government-initiated campaign seems to have fallen on deaf ears. For, when it comes to the crunch, many Malaysians continue to opt for foreign products.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, obviously unhappy with the attitude of Malaysians, expressed his regret in Alor Star on Friday that some Malaysians still lack confidence in locally-produced goods.

The Sports Ministry seem to be one of them.

They opted for foreign electronic scoreboards to be installed at several venues, including the Bukit Jalil main stadium, indoor stadium and swimming complex, for the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games.

Despite the availability of a local product - manufactured at the Balakong Industrial zone in Selangor by Industronics - the Ministry decided on Mitsubishi and Omega.

Sports Ministry secretary-general Datuk Ahmad Bakri Shabdin was reluctant to reveal the financial details.

One wonders why the secrecy when it is normal practice for the Government to display prices once tenders are called. In these difficult times, it is important for Government agencies to be transparent and above board. The Ministry may have their reasons for picking Mitsubishi and Omega but it is difficult to accept Bakri's argument that they would have had to call for a re-tender if Industronics were to be considered.

Bakri also claimed that when the tenders were called Industronics had yet to manufacture their product.

However, Industronics had informed the Ministry that by December 1997, their scoreboard would be on the market.

At the moment there is one Industronics scoreboard prominently on display at the Astaka Sports Complex in Kelana Jaya.

In fact, Industronics scoreboards are installed in 35 locations in the country, including the Larkin Stadium in Johor Baru, and the soccer stadium and swimming complex in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

Industronics scoreboards are also in Thailand, Brunei and the Philippines. They are expected to make their presence felt in Sydney, who will host the 2000 Olympics, with outdoor advertising display boards.

The Ministry had also expressed doubts about compatibility of Industronics scoreboard and timing equipment provided by other manufacturers.

However, the Industronics scoreboard worked well with Omega timing equipment at the Cheras pool, and with the Colorado timing and scoring equipment in Penang last year during the international junior diving competition.

One wonders how much the country could have saved if the Ministry had heeded Dr Mahathir's Love Malaysia, Buy Malaysia call.

But Malaysians, having enjoyed the good times with eight per cent growth for close to a decade now, are still in a spending mood.

Take Penang cycling officials for example. Their Chief Minister had already announced that Penang, the hosts for the 2000 Malaysia Games, would not be building a velodrome and will instead use the facility in Ipoh.

But their cycling officials are insisting on building their own velodrome.

There is no justification for such a facility in Penang.

Malaysia, with a population of 20 million, have two velodromes - in Kuala Lumpur (Cheras) and Ipoh. Both are under-utilised and maintenance is a burden for the local councils.

Universiti Malaya had planned for an artificial turf hockey pitch in their proposed multi-million ringgit sports complex. It is now on hold due to the economic situation.

In the first place, was there a necessity for such a pitch. What is the ratio of the student population that plays competitive hockey?

Even if the university were to host the Asean inter-varsity Games, all they have to do is look around the corner - the Kuala Lumpur hockey stadium in Pantai.

The Government should also be cautious in wanting to build too many stadiums and complexes.

One also needs to question the Ministry's move to install a scoreboard at the Cheras velodrome. How often do we have international championships, or even local meets, at the velodrome?

For that matter do we need permanent scoreboards as planned at the netball and lawn bowl stadiums in Bukit Kiara?

What comes as a surprise is that despite visiting several countries and witnessing major Games around the world - where there is prudent public spending - both Sports Ministry and Sukom Ninety Eight Bhd officials continue to inform the powers-that-be on the necessity of such facilities.

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