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Team Malaysia can strike back

THERE is more to cricket than two men running up and down a pitch. It is an intriguing game of strategy that relies on pinpoint accuracy, timing and opportunities to wreak havoc on the opposition. The idea is to read the game and respond intelligently, deploying team talent fully and wisely.

If Malaysia can similarly master the fine art of dealing with bad Press, then all the kangaroo courts in the world will not prevent the nation from bouncing back. Or, indeed, from turning an unsettling situation into one that reinforces the positive to score bonus points.

The latest farce in Washington has set the stage for yet another test of communications skills and endurance in riding out a disinformation campaign thinly veiled as an educational process. The facts of the case, such as it is, ostensibly review Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's "agenda" as team captain and put him on notice that Washington is interested and is "watching events".

We could react instantly or survey the field like a master batsman, before deciding whether to employ defensive options or come out fighting. For instance, there need be no quibbling over part of what was reportedly said at the Congressional Sub-Committee hearing.

Despite hiccups, bilateral relations between the United States and Malaysia are described as excellent. The Barisan Nasional's chances of achieving a sizeable majority in the next general election are not disputed. And Malaysians can expect to elect the next Government through established democratic procedures that reflect the popular will.

True, the hearing was a one-sided affair that did not represent Malaysian views as a common expression of natural justice. But this discourtesy - and demonstrated lack of credibility of speakers - will not be lost upon neutral and informed participants. The upshot will be that this ill-judged and poorly-attended function has only highlighted the organisers' selective agenda in raising non-issues.

Team Malaysia should instead direct its energies to where this is most needed and best appreciated. In business circles worldwide, economic strategies and data have a higher priority than political developments that have no measurable effect on domestic stability. US Ambassador to Malaysia S. Lynn Pascoe has found out as much on his current visit home with other US ambassadors to Asean member-nations.

If there is a perceived vacuum in information or if it is not reaching target audiences, then this is where Malaysia's momentum has to be intensified. The on-going series of roadshows or reverse roadshows will have to be extended beyond the initial projections and schedules that have been set. Every opportunity to aggressively promote Malaysia's diligence should be utilised, with nothing done that might distract attention from the issues.

This is no time to be reticent about the progress made since the dark days of 1997 and the nation's investment attractions into the new millennium. There is enormous interest in our economic recovery programme. There are queries about our preparation for changes in global trade and on effectiveness of the cyber-based infrastructure.

In any competitive arena, standards are constantly raised to new heights as competence, skills and techniques improve. Our choice must be not just to keep on top of the game, but to dominate it as far as possible.

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