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Playing at work is serious stuff

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THE Bengkel (workshop) that some businessmen accompanying Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on his recent official visit to Indonesia were seen at, had nothing to do with their official itinerary.

Neither was the Stadium they were in connected to possible business tie-ups with Indonesians.

The Hailal they were spotted at was certainly not halal as far as their business agenda was concerned.

Golf, certainly, did not figure in their business agenda.

All three are well-known night spots in Jakarta patronised by some of the businessmen at the expense of meetings with their Indonesian counterparts.

The errant businessmen came under fire from Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin who chastised them, saying they should not be part of any trade delegation abroad "just for show and to be seen with the Prime Minister." Daim, who pointed out that this was not the first time such an incident had happened, had added that accompanying the Prime Minister abroad on working visits was a serious affair as it involved the image and good name of the country.

While all work and no play is certainly not good business practice, their concentration on play has undermined the objectives behind them accompanying the Prime Minister. The Bengkel, in the Senayan business district, is a trendy singles nightclub frequented by the younger set while the Hailal is one of the largest karaoke outlets and located in the Ancol district.

The Stadium is a massage parlour-cum karaoke centre at Jalan Hayam Wuruk, the infamous red-light area near the Glodok district.

A Jakarta-based Malaysian correspondent said others also made excursions to discos at the Block M shopping precinct of Jakarta known to offer special 'services' to locals.

They were certainly not the usual entertainment venues where local businessmen meet to entertain.

A source present during the Prime Minister's visit said several groups of four to five businessmen were seen at their hotel lobby on Friday morning making arrangements to go out.

He said he observed how the group was making arrangements to hire several (Toyota) Kijang vans to ferry them to golf courses.

He said the group of 150 businessmen, who mostly stayed at the same hotel as the Prime Minister, played golf at several of the courses scattered around the city.

The source said he saw the group planning the excursion despite a one-on-one meeting with a group of Indonesian businessmen at the hotel, which was about to begin.

"They were dressed in casual clothes, but I would still give them the benefit of the doubt - perhaps they had prior business engagements scheduled elsewhere; meetings in which they were not required to dress in suits and ties," said the source.

Asked whether their absence in the meeting was noted, he said: "Anyone observant enough would surely have noticed."

Another source found it strange how some of the businessmen could find time to engage in such shenanigans when some Malaysian ministers and high-level officials from companies like Petronas were literally holed up at

the hotel they were staying due to their tight schedule during the visit.
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