

# People come first for **SP Setia Bhd**

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ABOUT three weeks before his emotional announcement to step down from office, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in an upbeat mood at a dinner which showcased his life and times as Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister.

He had seemed tired when he arrived for the SP Setia Charity Foundation event on May 29 because of the hectic schedule earlier in the day.

However, when the musical operetta started, he appeared refreshed.

The company had one of its employees to portray the Prime Minister in the operetta.

Themed *A Tribute to YAB Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia*, the employees spent more than 300 hours rehearsing and improving on the act. At least 250 staff members were involved in the production.

"The staff, from various races, did not portray their own communities. Instead, they were made to take on the role of others," said director Tan Sri Zaki Tun Azmi.

For the company, it was a triumph of sorts. The operetta marked an important agenda in its efforts towards showing its social responsibility to not only the community that had supported its business but mainly to its staff who had shown their commitment and loyalty to the organisation.

Zaki said the jubilant moment on whether the event touched the heart of the Prime Minister was when Dr Mahathir said: "I wish Datuk Seri (Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali) was here to see this. She would have enjoyed this."

Staff of the SP Setia Group of Companies began performing at charity dinners when the foundation was set up in early 2000.

Their involvement in company entertainment, however, goes back to 1996 when a 30-member choir was formed. From here, the staff started to organise theme dinners

**IN THE volatile property industry, SP Setia Bhd is among the household names that have withstood the wear and tear of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. But what it gains from the market, the company is now paying back in charity. Aptly, the goodwill starts from its own "home", writes FARIDAH BEGUM.**

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and this led to the formation of the group's Charity Foundation annual events.

Zaki, who has been the annual dinner organising chairman for several years, said he had noticed that the staff were more appreciative when their colleagues performed rather than when company spent on professional entertainers.

"We believe a reputable company should not just be a good producer but must generate motivation among the staff and provide a conducive working environment for them," he added.

Recapping the days of the currency crisis, Zaki said 1997 was not an easy year for the housing sector.

He said the economic crash came at a time when the property market was quite comfortable and growth had been steady. Malaysians, he said, were riding on a trend to purchase second homes.

"When it became apparent that the sector would be badly hit, we reversed our plan to build high-end luxury homes, and went back to our niche of providing medium-cost homes in the RM100,000 to RM250,000 range."

Zaki said the group was prepared for cutbacks in its projects and made decisions which took into consideration that no matter what the situation, projects must be prepared for to-the-minute changes.

Despite the sombre mood in the industry when the currency crisis crashed the economy, the staff at SP Setia continued to be in high spirits and when they held their annual event that year, some 70 employees dressed up as diva Tina Turner to belt out her popular numbers.

Zaki said the company believes in its people. "They have given us more than just entertainment and comradeship.

"The ties stretch beyond the office and into their personal lives. All annual and charity dinners are attended by every staff member as well as their families," he added.

"I believe this improves the working relationship between the management and support staff."

The group's communications, corporate and finance manager, Jennifer Chow, said that initially, the staff were reluctant to take part in company events and some were terribly shy.

"Whenever they hear that we were looking for volunteers, they would try to make themselves invisible," she said laughingly.

However, the urge to try gradually surfaced among a few of them and one by one they approached her and they eventually organised one "immensely successful" dinner.

From 70 members in 1997, it became 120 the following year and by 2000 more than 150 employees had volunteered to be part of their annual charity event.

This year, with 250 people getting into the act, it proved to be the largest and "one of the most difficult to manage" company event faced by SP Setia as volunteers came from branches from across the country, including from Johor Baru, Rawang, Puchong and Putrajaya.

The Board of Directors went home to sleep that night with the Prime Minister's parting shot - as he got into his car to leave running through their minds: "It was a very good show."