

Maya Maju, Ezam: Here's what you should have done
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If I were the Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, I would have a meeting soon with Md Nizam Md Sheriff, the project director of Maya Maju Sdn Bhd, and Senator Ezam Mohd Nor.

This is so that I could thank them for presenting me with a case study on what not to do in the pursuit of excellence.

If I were Nizam, moreover, I would have a meeting with the entire team of my corporate communication immediately. I would thank them for their services and wish them good luck for their future undertakings.

Unless, of course, it was Nizam who had been calling all the shots since the Star front-paged on June 27 the news about the plight of migrant workers who have been hired to build one of the most majestic buildings of the country.

If I were Ezam, on the other hand, I would look myself in the mirror and give my face two tight slaps for having a big mouth, a small heart, and an even smaller brain to go with my tainted eyes.

Just what did the management of Maya Maju, the main contractor for the RM800 mil Istana Negara project, have in mind when they barred the Star reporters from attending their press conference held at the construction site of the National Palace on July 2?

If the ban was intended to stop the Star from reporting what transpired in the press conference, the people in Maya Maju must have felt egg on their faces when the paper reported the next day that "a transcript of the press conference was made available to the Star by a media member who attended the conference".

No one in Nizam's team seemed to have the mind to remind him that we are now living in the digital age. They could stop the "atoms", to use the words of renowned technology writer Nicholas Negroponte, that make up the physical presence of the reporters from going into the room; but they could never stop the words of the project director from being turned into "bytes" and aired all over the world.

The company might have had 1,001 reasons for turning away the reporters from the Star, but whichever way one looks at the entire episode of this unpleasant incident, there is only one conclusion: Maya Maju have simply shot themselves in the foot.

If I were Nizam, I would have graciously invited the two reporters to my office to personally thank them for highlighting the issue. I would make it known to them that the company has nine labour-intensive sub-contractors among 90 over big and small ones under its wings and I had to make sure that all their workers, be they local or foreign, were paid on time.

I would tell the reporters that I was aware that their investigative visit was based on calls made by some of the migrant workers and so I should not rule out the possibility that some of my sub-contractors could have failed me.

I would then assure them that I would definitely look into the matter. There might only be a few of them, but it would be a folly to see them as "terpencil" (marginal) as the number

might just grow and things would just go out of hand in the future.

"Look," I would say, "we're talking about a sacred and majestic project that would also serve as a lucrative tourist spot a la Buckingham Palace and the White House.

"No workers would march on the streets with placards telling the public how happy they are; but workers' picketing to make public their dissatisfaction is a common occurrence in a democratic country. That, of course, is the last thing I want.

"So, I'm really grateful to the Star for giving me the opportunity to nip the problem – if ever there's one - in the bud before it grows into an international disgrace," I would tell the reporters.

With a cool head and a little knowledge and finesse, Nizam could have easily turned the tide in Maya Maju's favour and scored a winner that would very much enhance the image of his company.

The Prime Minister would have been extremely proud to see one corporate leader who understands what he means by embracing the 1Malaysia concept and developing a culture of excellence – instead of one who had to resort to means that violate the spirit of a free press and outdated tricks that fool no one.

Just how a company entrusted with such a big and prestigious project could have failed so miserably in a simple PR exercise is baffling - and worrying when we put into context what Senator Ezam's call to have Malaysiakini and the Star probed by the Home Ministry.

It is sad to see that a Malaysian appointed one of the senators of the country not having the intelligence to understand that the entire issue could simply have been resolved with an open mind and the basic knowledge of public relations.

It is utterly embarrassing to have a senator who chooses to see through his own tainted eyes and speak with his own corrupted mind. How else can we explain Ezam's claim that the press reports by the Star and Malaysiakini are "anti-Malay and anti-Istana"?

Sorry, you scored an own goal, Senator Ezam. Is the mud that has been thrown in your direction in cyberspace on your face already?

So, now over to you, Mr. Prime Minister.

I'm sure you are aware that the Nizams and the Ezams in Malaysia represents a massive obstacle that stands in our way to a successful realization of the 1Malaysia concept. But being a leader who knows a thing or two about achieving excellence, you, I am sure, should know how to turn these negative elements into positive force.

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