

Has Najib been deceived?

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comment by **R. Nadeswaran**

WHO gave the deputy prime minister wrong or false information on the progress of the plans to turn the Tun Abdul Razak Research Centre in Brickendonbury into a high-performance centre for our athletes?

Based on such information, Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced last Thursday the centre would be fully operational by April. Now, he has been put in an embarrassing situation in view of the news from the East Herts Council that no application to renovate the centre has been received.

Why wasn't Najib told the truth? Shouldn't he have been told that the application has yet to be submitted and work would only start after the council gives its go-ahead?

Someone goofed – and goofed big time, and the DPM is left no choice but to correct himself, on behalf of the Cabinet Committee on Sports, which he heads.

And how did those involved in the project arrive at a figure of £10 million (RM69 million)? Were the figures picked out of thin air or were they actual figures based on estimates provided by the consultants?

Surely converting an existing building to a hostel and converting the existing cricket Oval into football pitch, and extending an existing swimming pool would not cost that sum.

A quick on-line search of the classified columns of the local newspapers in the area reveal that three-bedroom houses cost between £150,000 and £250,000. Therefore, taking the higher end, the government will be better off buying 40 houses instead of spending such a humongous sum just to renovate the existing centre.

Besides, if the under-16 footballers are going there to be trained by Arsenal, Brickendonbury should be the last place where they should be housed. Arsenal's training base is in London Conley – 60km away, which means someone is going to suggest purchasing a coach, which means more money.

Sports Minister Datuk Azalina Othman says that after the footballers, the hockey players will be based there. But the base of British hockey is in Milton Keynes, where there are proper training facilities.

Wouldn't it be worthwhile investing in property in and around such centres? For example, the home of British athletics is in Crystal Palace where pre and post-competition conditioning is carried out.

Now, we hear that there are plans to expand the swimming pool. For what? Unless it is a heated indoor pool, it will be redundant for a good nine months of the year!

Why are we obsessed with having a "high-performance centre" when our athletes (except for squash and badminton players) have not achieved any significant standards to warrant being sent to such a centre?

Or for that matter, is such a centre necessary in when the standards of most of our athletes are mediocre, to say the least?

Experts will tell you that you can't expect someone who runs the 100m in 11 seconds to improve to running a sub-ten by just being in a high-performance centre. So, why all this money on something that will not bring the desired results?

Having said that, it was the same sports ministry which paid substantial sums of money to the Everton Football Academy, whose coaches came to our shores two years ago. They held coaching clinics in Penggarang, Pekan and Kepala Batas, which happen to be the constituencies of Azalina, Najib and the prime minister respectively.

So, where are the boys who went through the Everton coaches? Have they made any significant improvement and are they knocking on the doors of the national team?

It's time to re-look at how taxpayers' money is used. Yes, we need to excel in sports. Yes, we need world beaters, but we certainly can do without a high-performance centre until we reach greater heights.