

Let Petronas do its job properly already

Kinibiz.com

Jan 10, 2014

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Petronas is again condemned for supposedly not doing enough for Bumiputeras, and Tiger can only shake its head at the misguidedness of it all. Is it so hard to wean ourselves from freebies in this country? If everyone would leave Petronas to pursue its real objectives in peace, maybe Petronas would be able to improve itself much faster.

Tiger rules his jungle. Have you ever wondered why? Because Tiger can enforce its claim as king of the jungle with its magnificent strength and claws and teeth, and no others can challenge its claim.

Of course the human jungle is more civilised, and brute strength is a somewhat tasteless basis of entitlement. Tiger understands the two-legged respects law-provisioned rights, keeping promises, upholding responsibilities, performing duties, and so on.

But one thing is constant: if you make demands or claim rights to something, you need something to back it up.

So yesterday's news of a group called the Malay Economic Action Council (MTEM) demanding Petronas chief executive officer and president Shamsul Azhar Abas to resign if he cannot take care of their interests piqued Tiger's interest in what Tiger heard was "an expletive-ridden rant".

Petronas is by no means an insignificant animal in the jungle and to blast strong words its way is no small matter. What then is MTEM's basis for its demand?

In a nutshell, MTEM apparently feels that Petronas has not given enough projects and contracts to Bumiputera companies and is incensed at the perceived favouritism of Petronas towards foreigners at the expense of locals when it comes to the oil and gas business.

"Petronas investment strategies are now skewed to favour alliances with the more developed countries, hence hurting friendships that had been established for decades with their third world neighbours," said MTEM.

Also, the group feels Petronas under Shamsul has restructured strategic policies that now no longer works in favour of them.

"Patience is running low ... Shamsul must come clean about his plan and policies that must benefit Malaysians first," said MTEM. "Otherwise he should go."

But is Shamsul obligated to do things the way MTEM apparently wants him to?

We should remember that Petronas was incorporated by law to be entrusted with the nation's entire oil and gas resources for the benefit of the nation. But as Tiger has examined before, Petronas' obligations does not expressly include taking care of the Bumiputera players in the industry.

In contrast, Petronas' real responsibilities lie in developing our oil and gas wealth and adding value to them. Being wholly government-owned, Petronas is a major source of income for the country and to Tiger that satisfies the "benefit of the nation" obligation well enough.

That said Petronas has done more than its fair share for Bumiputeras, as Tiger has argued before in this article. Too much, in fact, to the point of sacrificing efficiency and quality.

Now MTEM wants more yet there is nothing to support this claim for more except assertions and a sense of entitlement. High on something, are we now?

What must not be forgotten is that while Petronas is a state-owned company, it is still a company and should operate like a company. That means quality should be priority, as is efficiency, and maximising profit by not carrying dead meat or paying unnecessary rentals, if you catch Tiger's drift — this is what would really "benefit Malaysians first", not patronage and handouts.

Not that Tiger is saying Petronas is fully up there in all these aspects yet, by the way, but don't let Tiger digress.

What Tiger sees in Shamsul's changes is actually an attempt to somewhat breakaway from these detrimental aspects of the Malaysian business climate. And that is good. Let Petronas continue on this path to betterment and support it by way of constructive criticism (like this and this).

And if Petronas is now able to entice major global players in developed countries to form partnerships with it then it must be doing something right.

Which makes this apparent desire for Petronas to lower its standards and handicap itself with inferiority baffling. If the local players want to partake in Petronas' business activities, they should improve their own standards and make themselves worth hiring.

Ultimately all Malaysians, as the eventual shareholders of Petronas, would benefit from the corporation being accountable, profitable and efficient, operating at global standards.

Tiger must emphasise the word "all" there because the beneficiaries of Petronas should not be a handful of companies who would not survive in the business jungle without patronage and freebies yet continue screaming for more help out of a misguided, baseless sense of entitlement.

Alas, Tiger wonders how MTEM has remained in the spotlight for so long, given the things they keep saying. In their rant MTEM also claimed that Petronas cleaned up Dr Mahathir's office within 24 hours of the latter resigning his advisor post, condemning the corporation for the disrespect done to the former premier by doing so.

This is just absurd to Tiger. First, the post of Petronas advisor is under the prime minister's purview, not Petronas. That means Petronas has no say one way or another over appointments to and resignations from that post.

Second, the resignation is yet to be accepted by the prime minister, based on his request for Mahathir to reconsider.

Would Petronas really exceed its brief and clean out Mahathir's office so quickly without concrete confirmation that Mahathir has indeed left the post? Would it not be normal and more realistic for Petronas to await official word and then let the former premier send for his personal belongings before cleaning out the place?

A bit of an imagination stretch isn't it, MTEM's claim.

That said if the resignation was indeed accepted and the post officially becomes vacant, Tiger doesn't see a problem with Mahathir's office being cleared and locked after his personal things are collected. It's their facility after all.

What's all this fuss about?

GRRRRR!

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