

Malaysia gets 'D', South Korea 'A-' in handling of tragedies, says Bloomberg columnist

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Bloomberg columnist William Pesek criticised Prime [Minister](#) Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Putrajaya in their handling of the search for MH370. Putrajaya was once again slammed by a Bloomberg columnist who compared Malaysia's handling of the MH370 saga with South Korea's response to the recent Sewol ferry tragedy.

In a scathing attack, columnist William Pesek said he would give top marks to South Korea for their handling of the ferry tragedy but found Malaysia sorely lacking in handling the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370.

He said the incidents could be described as tests for the two governments, if not of Malaysian and South Korean societies.

"The grades so far? I'd give Korea an A-, Malaysia a D," he said in his Bloomberg column titled "One missing jet, one sunken ferry, two responses".

Pesek said in the two weeks since the ferry sank, killing about 300 people on board, the South Korean government had reacted with self-questioning, shame and official penitence.

"President Park Geun Hye issued a dramatic and heartfelt apology. Her No. 2, Prime Minister Chung Hong Won, resigned outright. Prosecutors hauled in the ship's entire crew and raided the offices of its owners and shipping regulators. Citizens and the media are demanding speedy convictions and long-term reforms," he said.

On the flip side, there was no such reaction on the part of Malaysian authorities 56 days after MH370 vanished, said Pesek.

"No officials have quit. Prime Minister (Datuk Seri) Najib Razak seems more defiant than contrite. The docile local news media has focused more on international criticism of Malaysia's leaders rather than on any missteps by those leaders themselves," he said.

Pesek said although both countries are democracies, the key difference is the relative openness of their political systems.

"One party has dominated Malaysia since independence, while Korea, for all its growing pains and occasional tumultuousness, has seen several peaceful [transfers](#) of power over the past quarter-century.

"Unused to having to answer critics, Malaysia's government has responded defensively.

"Korean officials, on the other hand, are reflecting, addressing the anger of citizens, and delving into what went wrong with the shipping industry's regulatory checks and balances," he pointed out.

Pesek said South Korea was most likely to emerge from the crisis stronger than ever, unlike Malaysia.

He said this could be seen from the way both countries handled the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

Pesek said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was the prime minister then, had blamed the ringgit's plunge on some shadowy Jewish cabal headed by George Soros instead of internalising what had gone wrong.

"It didn't admit it had been using capital inflows unproductively and that coddling state champions – including Malaysia Airlines – was killing competitiveness. Never did the ruling United Malays National Organisation consider it might be part of the problem."

Pesek said South Korea, on the other hand, forced weak companies and banks to fail, accepting tens of thousands of job losses.

South Korean authorities, he said, clamped down on reckless [investing and lending](#) and addressed moral hazards head-on.

"Koreans felt such shame that millions lined up to donate gold, jewellery, art and other heirlooms to the national treasury."

Pesek said while South Korea's response wasn't perfect, the country's economic performance since then speaks for itself.

"Now as then, Korea's open and accountable system is forcing its leaders to look beyond an immediate crisis. Ordinary Koreans are calling for a national catharsis that will reshape their society and its attitude toward safety. Park's government has no choice but to respond.

"Malaysia's government, on the other hand, appears to be lost in its own propaganda.

"To the outside world, acting Transport Minister (Datuk Seri) Hishammuddin Hussein performed dismally as a government spokesman: He was combative, defensive and so opaque that even China complained.

"Yet Hishammuddin is now seen as prime-minister material for standing up to pesky foreign journalists and their rude questions. The government seems intent on ensuring that nothing changes as a result of this tragedy.

"As hard as it seems now, South Korea will move past this tragedy, rejuvenated. Malaysia? I'm not so sure." – May 2, 2014.

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