

## **Don't use MH370 search as excuse for handouts**

**Kinibiz.com**

**May 26, 2014**

**By Khairie Hisyam**

Flight MH370's disappearance remains a mystery but the announcement that Malaysian companies may have room to join the search efforts for the missing jet has Tiger worried. Will we fumble this too? Tiger hopes not.

In three weeks, it would be 100 days since MH370 went incommunicado on March 8. From what Tiger can see, from deep within its own jungle, we have learned some of the lessons on the table following this tragedy, although there are many to learn still.

But the big question remains. What happened to flight MH370? No one knows for certain yet. Tiger feels great sadness for the passengers and crew as well as their families, the latter of whom are deprived of closure to their great losses.

With that in mind Tiger was surprised and then apprehensive when, last week, the Committee for Assets Deployment under the Ministry of Defence (Mindef) announced that it has identified how Malaysian companies can participate in the search for MH370.

Bernama reported the committee as saying that it has received several proposals from some companies in regard to the underwater search offering to contribute. "The proposals are being evaluated based on suitability and costs that will arise," said the committee in a statement.

And furthermore Mindef also said that the involvement of companies like Petronas, Boustead Heavy Industries, Sapura Kencana and Deftech in the search was in-line with the outcome of the Malaysia-Australia-China tripartite meeting earlier this month.

At this point Tiger concedes that perhaps there are many companies within Malaysian shores who have specific expertise, equipment and other assets that may be helpful in the search. On the question of need, Tiger prefers to give the benefit of doubt.

But Tiger must admit to being worried about how the government will go about roping in these companies for help.

Who are these companies and what are they proposing to offer towards the search efforts? How much will their contributions cost and who would pay for it? Will all these details be made public?

The sensitivity of the tragedy and the emotional costs of our as yet fruitless efforts to uncover the truth as well as find the plane must be taken into consideration when pondering this news. Bear in mind that we have seen the government directly awarding contracts to selected corporate players in lieu of having open tenders many times over the years, even when it concerns public interests, and for which numerous issues and controversies have risen in those years.

For a quick example of such dealings think water concessionaires and the early independent power producers (IPPs) contracts — not only were they directly awarded but the agreements were kept hidden from public view through the Official Secrets Act 1972 (OSA).

For the purposes of MH370 and the urgency of the ongoing search efforts, open tenders may prove too lengthy and there may be a very limited number of companies that can offer a specific type of contribution anyway. That means, in this Tiger's opinion, that we might likely see direct appointments and awards of roles to these companies.

The danger fraught in going down this path is that there will be critics who question the involvement of these companies, perhaps even equating it with the much-criticised lucrative handouts to a select few that we have seen many times in the past.

And it would only help the critics if the government does not exercise sensitivity and transparency in bringing in expertise, assets and equipment from the corporate side. It cannot do this the way it has handled the IPP and water concession awards, for example.

In that scenario will the government take the effort to justify each and every allocation of money spent on the contributions of these companies? Will it break away from the tendency to classify agreements under the OSA and make full disclosures to the public — both Malaysian and non-Malaysian — for every job?

Some of Malaysia's critics, who sometimes have crossed the line of fairness in airing their views, will be waiting to pounce on any misstep. Therefore it is of paramount importance that this particular aspect of the search be handled with due care.

The world is watching us still. And we should be watching ourselves too, always.

GRRRRR!!

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <http://www.kinibiz.com/story/tigertalk/87678/don%E2%80%99t-use-mh370-search-as-excuse-for-handouts.html>