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THE letter from Express Rail Link Sdn Bhd, operators of the fast train service between KL Sentral and KLIA, on *theSun*'s front page report last Monday was telling indeed. The opening paragraph had this sentence: "The article contains highly misleading and inaccurate information."

Then the letter went on to say: "To state without researching the point that 'You pay - even if you don't use the ERL' is highly irresponsible and implies that the project and its sponsors are profiteering at the expense of the Malaysian public. It has put the ERL and its sponsors in an unfavourable light for which we hold you accountable."

Its chief executive officer, Dr Aminuddin Adnan, went on to say: "The numbers you quote as being the amount received by the project from airport taxes annually is grossly inaccurate and again without regard to the truth."

As readers of this column would have

Pray tell us the facts



CitizenNades
by R. Nadeswaran

noted, I have at all times corrected mistakes made and I have no qualms about saying "Sorry". Yes, we may have made a mistake in our calculations on the quantum received by ERL.

So, the following day, I shot off a letter to Aminuddin: "(Your) letter, inter-alia claims that the 'article contains highly misleading and inaccurate information.' Could you kindly specify which part or parts of the article you referred to is misleading? You have also claimed that we have provided inaccurate information. Please provide the 'accurate' information which we will be able to disseminate to our readers."

Aminuddin's reply which came on Wednesday, among others said: "We would like to reiterate that your figures are inaccurate. However, we are unable to provide details as we are not a public listed company and such information is deemed confidential."

You tell me: "You are wrong." So, I say: "Tell me what is right." Then you say: "I can't tell you what is right or where you went wrong but I can tell you were wrong."

But what I want to say is that these figures do not come under the ambit of the Official Secrets Act. Besides, the public want to know how much of their money goes to subsidising the rail link to the airport. Is this not a fair request?

Notwithstanding the claims of confidentiality, isn't Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd - which forwards a portion of the money collected as airport tax to the ERL - under the purview of the Transport Ministry?

The Transport Ministry must tell us everything on the government's deal with ERL. I am sure

by revealing such figures the security of the nation is not going to be compromised in any way. After all, the Prime Minister himself has promised more openness.

The right way to start and move forward is making public such subsidies which we, the people, are providing, to keep some public services in business, which forwards portion of the money collected as airport tax to the ERL.

ON THURSDAY afternoon, I told a public forum that claims of reforming the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) were worth a good laugh because it will not be independent even if its status was changed to "Commission".

"Nothing is going to change. You can call it by any name, they are still not independent ... Don't expect the big fish to be caught. Don't expect anything, I'd like to be proven wrong," I told representatives from civil society groups, the banking industry, government departments and academics.

The ACA took just 24 hours to prove me right. On Friday afternoon, it issued a statement clearing the Women in Sports Fitness Foundation Malaysia of any wrongdoing on expenditure totalling RM1.4 million. It went on to say that the

then Youth and Sports Minister only acted as a patron and was not involved in any expenditure by the foundation. No one said anything to the contrary or linked her to the abuse of funds. So, why enter into the denial mode?

I have no qualms about that. No one accused the ex-minister in spending the money. What Terence Fernandez and I asserted was that the National Sports Council had approved RM9.72 million for the foundation and that the ministry had forwarded a further RM1.5 million.

The crux of the issue is: On what basis was this money doled out by the NSC and the ministry when grants and subsidies for national sports associations and national trainees were slashed? No answers have been forthcoming and don't expect the "openness" that the PM has been advocating. Those responsible have retreated into their little cocoons, choosing to maintain silence to protect their political masters.

Now back to the ACA statement. What we handed over were the accounts and in our 60-minute chat with an officer of the rank of assistant commissioner, we pointed out other startling figures.

We cannot help feeling that the whole exercise was a *sandiwara* and we were unwittingly roped in as "extras".

There was one expenditure to the tune of RM800,000 for rental of equipment. Our investigations showed that this was for the rental of canopies at the UPM hostel where the athletes stayed. We were told that there were no proper dining rooms and food had to be served under the canopies. So, even if you rented 100 canopies at RM200 a day for six days, it would only amount to RM120,000. Where did the rest go to? The answer given by the foundation was: "To hire photostat machines and fax machines." For RM680,000, you could have bought them all! Did the ACA bother to go through the books?

So, the ACA took the myopic view - to check on the RM1.4 million spent on the opening ceremony! What about the production cost? Did anyone check the current market rates? Did they check whether there was a conflict of interests in the selection of suppliers? Were open tenders called?

No. While it is the norm for the ACA to take months to even start their probe, they completed this one in five days - a feat that needs to be listed in the *Malaysia Book of Dubious Records!*

And the "independent" ACA expects the people to have faith in its work! All that can be said is: Fat hopes!

R. Nadeswaran believes the Prime Minister did the right thing by espousing the need for openness in all government dealings. However, the people down the line appear to be openly defying him and getting away with it. Views and comments to: citizennades@thesundaily.com

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