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13<sup>th</sup> April 2013

Mrs Rosa Daniel  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Heritage Board  
61 Stamford Road #03-08  
Stamford Court  
Singapore 178892

Dear Madam,

**RE: INCORRECT USAGE OF 'RUMAH BENDAHARA' FOR HISTORIC GEDUNG KUNING**

I am the author of *Gedung Kuning: Memories of a Malay Childhood* and *The Mango Tree* books. My family owned and stayed in Gedung Kuning (Yellow Mansion) in Kampong Glam from 1912 to 1999 until the government acquired it under the Land Acquisition Act. Mamanda Restaurant currently operates at Gedung Kuning.

Recently, I noticed that a wedding invite (and signage) at my birthplace indicated the venue as Mamanda@Rumah Bendahara.

I would like to highlight two historical facts:

1. There is no record of a Bendahara (Prime Minister or Vizier in the Malay kingdom) in the court of Sultan Hussien or his descendants.
2. No Bendahara or its equivalent ever lived in Gedung Kuning.

Hence, stating that Mamanda is at Rumah Bendahara (House for the Prime Minister) is misleading and factually incorrect. Circa 1846, Tengku Mahmud gave Gedung Kuning its name after its yellow walls and the name has remained since. I remember how in 2005, former MP Zainul Abidin Rasheed discussed with me about changing the name Gedung Kuning to Rumah Bendahara for "glamour/marketing purposes". As there is no documentary evidence to indicate that the Riau Bendahara was based in Singapore, I opposed the idea and it was dropped.

A historic monument like Gedung Kuning must be given its due honour. Except for the heritage trail board outside Gedung Kuning (put up by the National Heritage Board), Mamanda did not acknowledge, in its publicity collateral and website, the real history of Gedung Kuning or about my great-grandfather Haji Yusoff the Belt Merchant. Perhaps the owners of Mamanda were hesitant to mention the history of Gedung Kuning after I admonished them on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2012 for plagiarising the contents of my website ([www.gedungkuning.com](http://www.gedungkuning.com)) without acknowledging me. As the owners did not bother to reply to my email of 26<sup>th</sup> February 2013 correcting them about the usage of the word 'Rumah Bendahara', I decided to write to the press about this matter. The Online Citizen and Berita Harian published my letter on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2013 respectively.

Despite my email and letters concerning this matter, the owners of Mamanda went ahead and published two advertisements on Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013 and on Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> April (both on the front page of Berita Harian). The 8<sup>th</sup> April advertisement stated ‘Majlis Perkahwinan @ Rumah Bendahara’ (Wedding ceremony @ Bendahara’s House). The tagline was “*Hubungan cinta diraja dengan santapan Melayu bermula 150 tahun yang lalu dan terus hingga ke hari ini di Mamanda.*” – Royal love affair with Malay cuisine started 150 years ago and continues to this day at Mamanda. The tagline gave the impression that Royalty had been staying in Gedung Kuning since 150 years ago, and their love for fine Malay cuisine continues until today at Mamanda. This is clearly wrong, as Gedung Kuning had reverted to being private property in 1907. The 9<sup>th</sup> April advertisement stated “Mamanda: Dining@Bendahara Residence”. Notwithstanding the incorrect grammar, the statement is factually wrong, as Gedung Kuning was never a residence for the non-existing Bendahara.

It is also ironic that the first line of the poem on both advertisements stated “*Gedung Kuning tersegam indah*” (Gedung Kuning stood beautiful). Why confuse the public? The owners of Mamanda are not ignorant of the history of Gedung Kuning due to our past correspondences; they knew of [www.gedungkuning.com](http://www.gedungkuning.com) (a one stop portal about all things Gedung Kuning). Hence, why emphasize the blatant historical error?

The pertinent question remains – why attempt to hide the real story of Gedung Kuning? What good would hiding historical facts do to anyone? This matter is not just a question of names but also a matter of past legacy that must be told. Oral history plays an important part in the Malay culture. Images of the past are embodied in the language. As Gedung Kuning embodies that ‘image of the past’, to change its name is akin to distorting the facts of history.

I hope the National Heritage Board would look into this matter seriously as the public must not be misled about historical facts that are now being compromised for the sake of branding or/and marketing. Historical facts must remain true lest the future generation forgets the real history and accept what was given to them as the truth. The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) too plays a crucial role in ensuring that information portrayed to tourists is accurate lest the STB would be seen to be tweaking historical facts for that added marketing glitz.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

*hidayah*

Encl. Correspondences between Former MP Zainul Abidin Rasheed and Hidayah Amin  
Advertisement “Majlis Perkahwinan @ Rumah Bendahara” on Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013  
Advertisement “Dining @ Bendahara Residence” on Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2013  
Signage of a recent wedding held in Gedung Kuning  
Printout of SPH Treats stating ‘Mamanda@Bendahara House’ (20% off dining bill)

Cc. Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs  
Madam Zuraidah Abdullah, Chairman of Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF)  
MHF Board members  
Mr Lionel Yeo, CEO Singapore Tourism Board  
Prof Tommy Koh, Ambassador-at-large & former Chairman of National Heritage Board  
Mr Warren Fernandez, Editor, The Straits Times  
Mr Saat Abdul Rahman, Editor, Berita Harian