

Dear Mr Michael Koh,

I am writing to lodge a formal complaint against the Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF) for the way it handled the matter of the mango tree at Gedung Kuning. I am sure you are aware of this matter or may have already been briefed either by Madam Zuraidah Abdullah, CEO of MHF or Madam Julina Khusaini, the General Manager (GM). In any case, please refer to the timeline enclosed.

Here are my reasons to complain:

### **1. The lack of communication, transparency and accountability between the MHF, MHC (Malay Heritage Centre) and stakeholders (myself)**

I was informed by the GM via email on 25 June that the “*Management has... made the decision to have the tree removed from the premises.*” She also stated that they had “*reviewed all the inputs, feedback and recommendation*” and enclosed an arborist report of 8 June. I was under the impression that the tree was still standing (but to be removed soon). After all, it was only polite to inform the moral owner of the tree before chopping it down, and not chop and tell her two days later.

It also appeared that the MHC and the MHF are not aware of each other’s actions as I was informed that the “*MHC is not involved in the decision nor were we informed of the actions taken with regards to Gedung Kuning property.*”

I emailed the GM on 26 June but did not receive any response. Only when my letter to Berita Harian (BH) was published on 30 June, did the GM reply on 4 July. To avoid a newspaper ‘war’, I emailed the GM my rebuttal to her points (please refer to email of 5 July) and only received a letter on 17 July stating, “*We have looked into the matter. As the reason why the mango tree had to be cut had been addressed in our response to the article... we will not be replying further to your queries in your email of 5 July 2012.*”

Clearly, the MHF does not believe that the stakeholder is entitled to any explanation to the pertinent questions raised. Apparently, the MHF is taking the cowardly way than to reply to my questions that might expose the fallible arguments put forth by the MHF to justify its actions.

### **2. The lack of courtesy or budi bahasa unbecoming of a Malay Heritage Foundation**

It appeared that the MHF for whatever reason believes that it was right in chopping down the tree and hence did not offer any apology (in the email of 25 June, 4 July letter in Berita Harian and letter dated 10 July which I only received on 17 July). Perhaps the MHF has forgotten that even though I am no longer the legal owner of the tree, I am still the moral owner and it would only be courteous to inform me before a drastic action is taken. It is unfortunate that the MHF does not exercise *budi bahasa* that is characteristically Malay and a custom that the Malays are proud of.

Perhaps the MHF is not aware of the trauma that I went through due to its actions. I was emotionally affected and could not stop crying for more than two weeks. It seemed that the MHF was more concerned that the “*girdling roots may cause the tree to uproot or it may introduce decay into the root system*” than the hurt caused to a human being by its rash actions. As reiterated, there had been no empathy on the part of the MHF from the beginning or it would have exercised some courtesy.

### **3. Blatant disregard for things heritage contradictory to the mission of the MHF**

The mission of the MHF is to “*preserve Malay cultural heritage by striving to explore, trace, research, preserve and present the origins and evolution of the community’s rich cultural heritage locally, regionally and internationally, and also to become the reference point for the Malay*

community, especially for the younger generation to identify themselves in the context of multi-racial Singapore.” Contrary to its mission to “preserve and present the origins and evolution of the community’s rich cultural heritage”, by chopping down the tree and not taking steps to preserve it, the MHF has demonstrated that it prefers efficiency than to exercise thoughtful albeit slower methods in preserving the tree. The MHF has not only exercised hasty judgement but has committed an offence against nature for cutting down an “*overall healthy*” tree (and yes, many plant pathologists will argue that girdling roots can be saved).

Marcus Garvey once said, “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” By uprooting the mango tree at Gedung Kuning, the MHF has unjustly obliterated the preservation of Malay cultural practice of planting a fruit seed to commemorate the birth of a child.

#### **4. Lack of respect to the former owner and resident of Gedung Kuning**

Perhaps you are not aware of this but the MHF that is supposedly responsible for the tenants at Gedung Kuning has not been exercising their responsibilities well. An example, I requested the MHF to place the acknowledgement plaques for our items (on loan) displayed at Gedung Kuning on 27 February 2003 but the MHF only put them up three years later in mid 2006 (despite constant email reminders). Some of the plaques are still missing and I had again reminded the GM on 26 December 2011 about this matter.

We were informed during the 6 April 2012 meeting that our mirrors were broken, to which the GM said that their lawyers are dealing with the former tenant on the issue of liability. We have yet to receive any update on this.

The recent case of the current tenant Mamanda (<http://mamanda.com.sg/>) plagiarising the content of my website ([www.gedungkuning.com](http://www.gedungkuning.com)) without acknowledging the source highlights my point. Despite informing the owners and the GM on 13 May 2012 about the privacy policy of my website, Mamanda went ahead to violate copyright laws on 11 July. When I informed them about this, there was no apology offered, merely “*Thank you for the feedback as we overlook on the matter. We have remove it.*” Such is the respect shown to the former owner and resident of Gedung Kuning.

By the way, it is ironic that one of the photos displayed on Mamanda’s website shows Gedung Kuning and the mango tree when in actual fact, the mango tree has been chopped down. One wonders if perhaps the reason for chopping down the tree is to accommodate the tentage at the recent food festival.

In conclusion, I am highly unhappy and disappointed at how the MHF had dealt with the issues pertaining to the mango tree and Gedung Kuning. The mango tree episode has unfortunately cast a bad light on the MHF. Singaporeans (Malays and non-Malays) who followed the events are able to decipher from the evidence that the MHF has ‘botched-up’ but alas, it is too arrogant to admit its mistakes.

My loss is irreplaceable. But the MHF can still redeem its waning reputation by doing the right thing to win back the confidence of the public.

Thank you.

Best regards,

*Hidayah*