



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I have kept very quiet about the resignation of Dr Yeoh Eng Kiong, my former Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, because I felt that a cooling-off period was in order. That cooling-off period is, now, over. In my opinion, Dr Yeoh Eng Kiong was neither a liar nor an utterer of falsehoods in respect of his official statements, during the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in the territory, which took place in March 2003. There is a difference between an utterer of a falsehood and an utterer of a lie, you know. This is the difference:

Falsehood: A statement or assertion known to be untrue, and intended to deceive; a willful act or declaration, contrary to the truth.

Lie: An untruth, deliberately told; the uttering or acting of that which is false for the purpose of deceiving; intentional misstatement.

So you can see, from the above, that Dr Yeoh Eng Kiong does not fit the definitions of either that of a liar or that of an utterer of falsehoods. However, it would not be unfair or incorrect to call him a bloody fool. And that he is, to be sure. Some people feel a little sorry that he resigned. I don't. And, I suppose that the relatives of those unfortunate people who died because of Dr Yeoh Eng Kiong's lack of definitive action, also, don't feel very sorry for him. Faced with one of the biggest challenges of his career as a civil servant of the Government of Hongkong, he failed to perform his duty as was expected of him. A bus driver, who doses off for a second at the wheel of his vehicle, with his bus, full of people, can hardly claim that he was sorry for the deaths of his passengers, due to his momentary lapse. But that can hardly be considered a valid excuse for his negligence. He cannot, in defence, claim that he was only a little tired and that his nap only lasted for a few seconds, in any event. Dr Yeoh Eng Kiong fell asleep at the wheel of the bus of Hongkong, which contains nearly seven million people, the residents of territory, residents who trusted him to look after their welfare. Now, some of those people are dead, struck down by SARS. He exacerbated the problem of SARS in Hongkong by making statements which, in the light of day, were found to have been completely incorrect, or, if you prefer, not consistent with the facts that were known to many other Hongkong doctors, who were treating many of the population of Hongkong, those who had contracted SARS. I do not blame Dr Yeoh Eng Kiong for the outbreak of SARS, but I do blame him for making statements to the effect that SARS had not spread to the community, at large – when, in fact, it had. As the man in charge of this very important branch of my Government of Hongkong, he, literally, nodded off at the wheel. What is surprising to me is that he did not do the correct thing and resign earlier than he did. The Japanese would have taken action of a much more definitive and permanent nature than just stepping down from office more than one year after the event. But, then, again, the Japanese aristocracy has a very high standard of honour and accountability; and, do not hesitate to make this known when needs be such with very pronounced acts.

And, now, My Dear Grandchild, I have to dream up an excuse for not preparing Grandpa's chow tofu, which I can't stand, anyway. I will not lie about it, but I could, easily, stretch the truth a little bit, just like Grandpa does

when he is caught with his pants, down around his knees.

Love you,

The Chief Lady of Hongkong

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