

Malaysia: ‘I did the right thing’, says Top Glove whistleblower Yubaraj

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Yubaraj Khadka said he felt wronged by how Top Glove [terminated](#) his employment after he shared photographs proving a lack of physical distancing among factory workers.

Despite the consequences, the 27-year-old believes he did the right thing by whistle-blowing the situation at his former workplace and was thus “not afraid” to come forward with his story.

Speaking to *Malaysiakini* in colloquial Malay, Yubaraj, who hails from Nepal, said he spent the past eight years of his life working at Top Glove, only to be fired abruptly.

He claimed he was subjected to an 11-hour “counselling session” after he was identified as the source of the released photo images.

“They also took my phone away, from 10am until about 9pm at night. They looked through each and every one of my messages,” he recalled.

Reuters reported on Sunday that Yubaraj was terminated from his quality assessor role on Sept 23 after the company [identified him](#) using closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage.

In October, he was made to pay for his flight home and mandatory pre-departure Covid-19 test.

Two months on, he told *Malaysiakini* he never expected to be fired for speaking the truth.

According to Yubaraj, he had taken the photographs out of concern to show workers’ rights campaigner Andy Hall what working and living conditions were like at Top Glove.

Not only was the workers’ accommodation area overcrowded and poorly ventilated, he said, physical distancing was also not enforced in the factory, despite it being a requirement amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

“I didn’t know they would fire me for doing this,” he said.

Only later was he told that Top Glove employees were apparently not allowed to take or share any photographs of their workplace.

According to his termination letter, which *Malaysiakini* sighted, Top Glove classified Yubaraj’s act of taking photographs “without getting any prior approval from the management” as an act of misconduct that justified his dismissal.

This month, the Malaysian rubber glove manufacturer [admitted](#) to failing in the past to enforce the one-metre physical distancing rule among its factory staff but claimed to have corrected the transgression since then.

After the Department of Labour Peninsular Malaysia opened [19 investigation papers](#) into Top Glove for failing to comply with the Workers' Minimum Standard of Housing and Amenities Act 1990, the billion-dollar listed company now vows to spend [RM170 million](#) to build new hostels for its 21,000 workers.

"I did the right thing. They are the ones who did the wrong things," Yubaraj said.

Largest active Covid-19 infection cluster

Just as Yubaraj left Malaysia, Covid-19 cases began to spike at Top Glove's factories in Meru, Klang. Thousands of its workers have since contracted Covid-19 and are part of the Teratai cluster - which has 5,450 cumulative cases and is Malaysia's largest active infection cluster.

29-year-old Yamnarayan Chaudhary Tharu, also a Nepali, has become the first Top Glove employee [to die](#) from the infection.

Now in his hometown of Dhankuta, about 430km from Kathmandu, Yubaraj is still looking for a job but said he was happy to be surrounded by family and friends.

There was a claim for compensation and both parties arrived at a settlement. The terms of the settlement bar any details to be disclosed to a third party.

What Yubaraj was most glad about was how his grainy smartphone photographs helped shed light on what happens inside Top Glove.

He hoped this episode would pave way for better working conditions for his former colleagues and also encourage them to speak up against injustice.

"It is good that everyone knows about this now... If I hadn't complained to Andy and if there were no photographs, people would not have known about this.

"Now, at least, people follow the one-metre physical distancing rule," Yubaraj said.

Top Glove has yet to respond to requests from *Malaysiakini* for comment on the *Reuters* report on Yubaraj's dismissal.

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