

Corp governance through humour, cartoons

Mak Yuen Teen says upcoming book may be fun but serious message won't be lost; 'superhero' sequel being planned

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CORPORATE governance may be a weighty subject, but one of Singapore's most vocal and prominent advocates of it believes there is room to get the message across with a lighter touch.

Associate professor Mak Yuen Teen from the NUS Business School has decided to convey his thoughts on the subject through a soon-to-be-launched book of cartoons on various aspects of corporate governance, ranging from directorships, board diversity, regulation, to shareholders' rights.

"Many people think of corporate governance as a dry and very serious subject," Prof Mak tells *The Business Times*.

"I have always tried to lighten my commentaries and teaching by including a dash of humour to make the topic more interesting for readers and participants."

He said that he embarked on this cartoon project to liven things up even further, and has also used cartoons in some of his commentaries and teaching.

"I went back and looked at my file and it was more than three years ago when I started writing down concepts for cartoons. I've always tried to challenge conventions and to be innovative in dealing with what is now a mainstream topic."

Titled *Directors Daze: The Lighter Side of Corporate Governance*, the book contains 45 original single and multi-panel cartoons commissioned by Prof Mak and his co-author Chris Bennett and drawn by cartoonists at *fiverr.com*.

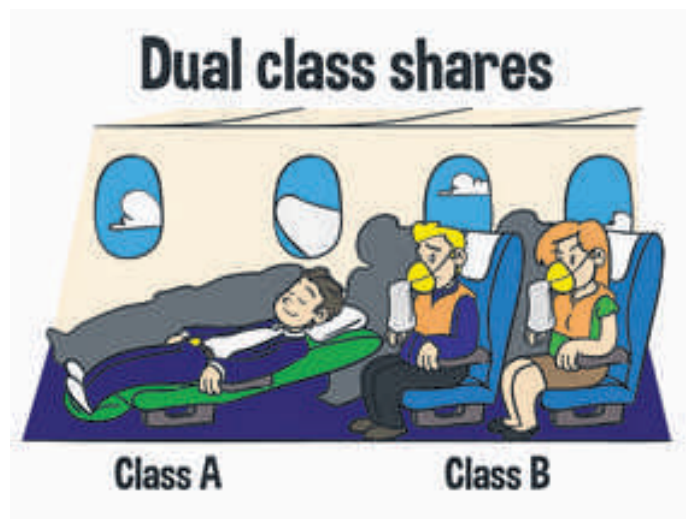
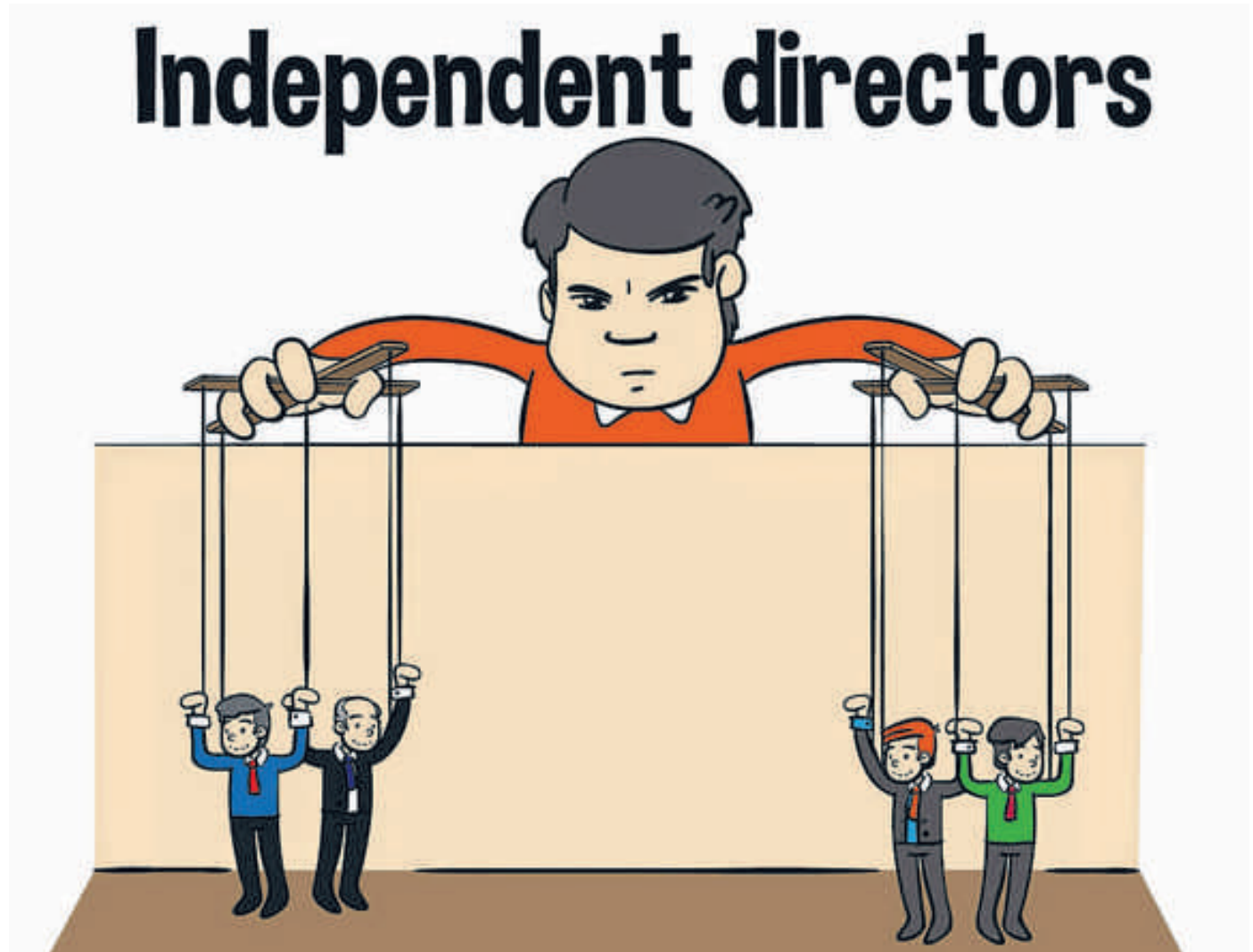
Mr Bennett, also a well-known corporate governance advocate, runs BPA Australasia, an enterprise concerned with improving corporate governance through professional education, research, and advocacy.

The cartoons show the authors' thoughts on a variety of corporate governance subjects with a "soft and appealing coating of humour", but with a "hard centre".

"We are hoping that the book will not only make people laugh, but it will make them reflect and learn a thing or two. There are serious messages not only for and about boards and directors, but also others like regulators, shareholders, consultants and professional bodies," says Prof Mak.

"We even have cartoons about so-called instant experts in 'governance and everything under the sun', and we take a dig at the proliferation of awards too. I can probably deliver a complete lecture on corporate governance using a selection of the cartoons – and have 'threatened' my students about doing so," he quips.

The book, which will be launched later



LIVENING THINGS UP

The cartoons in the book 'Directors Daze: The Lighter Side of Corporate Governance' show the authors' thoughts on a variety of corporate governance and other related subjects with a 'soft and appealing coating of humour', but with a 'hard centre'

this month, has already received much interest. Prof Mak says that several organisations, including the Australian Institute of Company Directors, CPA Australia in Singapore and the Iclif Leadership and Governance Centre in Malaysia, have agreed to help promote the book.

"I have had the managing partner of an accounting firm offering to buy several hundred copies for its clients, a senior manager of a bank offering to take a thousand or two for his clients, and interest from some well-known lawyers and professionals."

He also shared that, after a recent talk he delivered, "someone from a bank sent me an e-mail ordering copies for all her board members".

"She told me that some of the issues are sensitive for her board to discuss, and she feels the cartoons will help ease the tension in discussing them."

The profits from the sale of the book – which will be priced at \$20 – will go entirely to children's charities.

The book can be purchased from BPA's website (<http://bpa-australasia.com/publications>); orders can also be sent to

enquiry@bpaaustralasia.com.

Asked if he and Mr Bennett are planning a follow-up, Prof Mak said: "Our plan is to make the next one a proper comic, like a Spider-Man comic book that spins a whole story. It will be about corporate governance, which is what I know best."

"We are thinking maybe something like 'Misadventures of the Super Director'. I have talked to my collaborator Chris Bennett about writing the storyboard for this comic when we are on our Christmas holidays! That tells you how much fun we have had doing this one."