

12 NOV 1997

A News Focus

MALAYSIA IS NOT ANTI-JEW

By: Ali Mamat

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 12 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has yet to establish diplomatic ties with Israel, not because it is a Jewish state.

It is because of the Israelis' blatant disregard for human rights, the denial of the Palestinians' right to their homeland and the hardline and expansionist policies that Tel Aviv pursues.

Malaysians, as a matter of fact, do not hate Israel just because it is populated by Jews. What they cannot accept is the Zionist regime which rules Israel and which has cast aside the norms of nationhood as it follows a policy of the end justifying the means.

Zionism is generally abhorred because it promotes the ideology of hegemony which reflects narrow-mindedness and rejects the culture of co-existence with neighbours and other communities unless they are willing to be their stooges.

The Zionist ideology is almost similar to that of the Nazis of Germany in Hitler's era.

The Zionists however are an entity which should not be automatically linked to the Jews as followers of the Book.

Basically, this is the stand of Malaysian citizens and leaders which has often been misinterpreted by the Jews. As far as Malaysia is concerned, the Jews and Zionists are different entities.

It is probably this misinterpretation that led to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad becoming the target of endless attacks by Jews and certain Western nations which were the prime movers behind the birth of Israel in 1948.

Dr Mahathir was accused of being anti-Jew and anti-Semitic when he made public his suspicion that Malaysia's economic turmoil caused by speculative attacks on its currency was the work of certain Jews.

He had identified American billionaire George Soros, who is of Jewish descent, as one of the rogue speculators.

"We won't say it is a plot by the Jews but the truth is, those who were involved (in the speculative attacks on the ringgit) included Jews," the prime minister was quoted as saying while addressing a gathering in Terengganu.

Besides the United States, his statement drew flak from organisations and business corporations owned by Jews throughout the world. The US lashed out that Mahathir should not blame the Jews or any other ethnic groups for Malaysia's economic woes.

Dr Mahathir's subsequent clarification that he is not anti-Jew appears to have fallen on deaf ears.

A political science lecturer from a local university claimed that the Westerners' anger at Dr Mahathir is driven by their prejudice against him for being an outspoken leader who fought for truth and justice.

"Dr Mahathir is not at all anti-Jew. The records prove this," he said.

He pointed out that the Jews seem to have forgotten that Dr Mahathir had, in the past, made himself unpopular among certain Malaysians for being, what they claimed, pro-Israel.

In March, for example, he was criticised for allowing Israel to take part in an international cricket championship which was held in Kuala Lumpur. Several groups had held demonstrations to show their displeasure at having the Israeli players here.

Explaining why the Israeli cricket team was allowed to play in Kuala

Lumpur, Dr Mahathir said he wanted to use the opportunity to "show the West that the Muslims in Malaysia are capable of setting a good example to others and that their assumption that we are narrow-minded is not true."

The political science lecturer said the persistent accusations that Malaysians and Dr Mahathir are anti-Semitic only go to show how ignorant the Jews are.

"The Semites are a group of people in the Middle East who founded the Jewish religion, Christianity and Islam.

Does this mean that Dr Mahathir is also against the founders of Islam (Nabi Muhammad) and Christianity (Jesus Christ)? Does it also mean that he is against Prophet Daud who received the vision on the teachings of the Jewish religion through the Kitab Taurat? (Torah)" asked the lecturer.

A corporate leader, meanwhile, urged the Jews to recall Malaysia's stand on the controversy surrounding the visit of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong's younger brother, Tengku Abdullah Tuanku Abdul Rahman, to Israel in June 1994 in his capacity as a businessman.

Although Dr Mahathir was under pressure by various quarters to take action against Tengku Abdullah, the prime minister did no such thing.

All the authorities did was seize the passport belonging to Tengku Abdullah, who is also the chairman of Melewar Corporation.

"If Dr Mahathir was truly anti-Israel, he would have taken sterner action against Tengku Abdullah on the grounds that Malaysia does not have any diplomatic relations with the country he had visited," pointed out the businessman who is involved in the import and export of commodities.

According to the businessman, Malaysia's policy of allowing person-to-person business ties has benefitted both Malaysian and Israeli businessmen and it also proves that Dr Mahathir in particular, and Malaysians in general, are certainly not anti-Jews.

The Malaysian government adopted the policy of allowing business ties sometime early last year after having noted that the Israeli administration had taken positive steps in its efforts to seek a solution to its conflict with the Palestinians.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, however, said the policy will be reviewed if Israel under its new Prime Minister (Benjamin Netanyahu) is reluctant to pursue with the peace talks.

Abdullah's ministry has also stressed that Malaysia's diplomatic ties with Israel will only come under consideration if the Jewish state comes up with a comprehensive peace settlement with Palestine and neighbouring Arab nations like Syria.

But the absence of diplomatic ties does not mean that Malaysian citizens and leaders harbour ill-feelings against the Jews.

As a nation with multi-ethnic groups, Malaysia's Muslim leaders and community have never been known to despise other religions or races, including the Jews.

Malaysia's Muslim community and leaders are well-known for their tolerance. Although Islam is Malaysia's official religion, the people are free to observe other faiths.

Like other Malaysians, Dr Mahathir, too, firmly adheres to the Islamic principle of forging unity among all people, irrespective of race, colour, sex or religion. Islam is a religion which puts ample emphasis on tolerance, justice and the rule of law.

Perhaps, nowhere on earth except Malaysia can one find mosques, temples and churches built side by side.

The director of special affairs division in the Information Department Ustaz Fadzil Hanafi said no where in the Quran is there any verse which urges Muslims to regard non-Muslims as enemies.

In fact, he said, a hadith related by Bukhari and Muslim tells of the

following:

"Once, a cortege bearing the remains of a Jew passed in front of the Prophet SAW and he paused and paid respects to the dead man.

When asked why he did that when the dead man was a Jew, the Prophet SAW replied: I knew he was a Jew but he was also human."

A lecturer with the Islamic faculty of a local university said while Malaysians are against the Zionist regime, they have nothing against the Jews or their religion.

Malaysian citizens and leaders speak in the same voice when they lash out at the oppression faced by the Palestinian Muslims in the hands of the Zionist regime. This is because Islam evaluates a human being by his behaviour and actions, and not his sex, colour, race or religion.

It is based on this principle that Dr Mahathir refuses to budge from his stand that Malaysia supports the Palestinian cause because the Palestinians have every right to demand for the return of their seized homeland.

This is a question of basic human rights, not a question of hating the Jews or anyone else. -- Bernama

AM