

21/11/1997

The tumbler among American politicians

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SOME 10 years ago, the New York Philharmonic was invited to perform in Kuala Lumpur. It roused great enthusiasm among many, especially classical music lovers.

The visit was abruptly cancelled following controversy in sections of the local Press when it was announced that the orchestra would also be playing two Jewish pieces. The cancellation was considered unfortunate by some who felt unjustly deprived since more than three quarters of the scores to be performed were by German, Russian and other non-Jewish composers.

The matter did not end in Kuala Lumpur. In Washington, the Malaysian Embassy received hundreds of letters "protesting" the cancellation and criticising Malaysia.

An embassy official, now retired, recalled that the contents and wordings of the letters were the same throughout indicating that they all came from the same source orchestrating the so-called protest. In short, they were not the spontaneous response of ordinary American citizens.

A letter of explanation had earlier been sent by the embassy to the New York Times, but not a line was published in the newspaper famed for its slogan "All the news fit to print".

Time marches on. In late March this year, an Israeli cricket team participated in the Carlsberg International Cricket Tournament in Kuala Lumpur. It joined other teams, including those from Canada, Holland, Gibraltar, Singapore, Ireland, Denmark, Kenya, the United Arab Emirate and Bangladesh.

The Israeli participation drew protests and a demonstration was staged by several hundred Pas members. A memorandum was delivered to the Prime Minister's Department demanding cancellation of visas given to the team members.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had earlier explained that the decision to allow the Israeli team to play was to show Israelis that people of various religions could live together and that Muslims could cooperate with others, as they do in Malaysia, without conflict.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim advised that political parties should not mix politics with sports.

Time marches on again. A draft resolution has now been prepared by 34 US Congressmen led by Robert Wexler (Democrat-Florida) calling on Dr Mahathir to apologise for alleged anti-Jewish remarks during the recent currency turmoil failing which he should resign as Prime Minister.

Evidently ignored is Dr Mahathir's clarification on his alleged statement as reported by Bernama. As far as is known the news item on the clarification put out by the Malaysian National News Agency has not been carried in American newspapers or by CNN.

(Shown again is the power of the Jewish lobby in America. Published elsewhere was the Pope's admission that Christian prejudice, fuelled by "misinterpretation of the Gospel", had contributed to the persecution of Jews over the ages. The remarks were made in an international seminar in the Vatican on "The Christian Roots of Anti-Judaism").

One assumes also that Wexler has not read an announcement by Israeli Trade and Industry Minister Natan Sharansky that Israel would relax regulations of trade with Indonesia and Malaysia. Authorisation was expected to be given for the import of raw materials, finished components

and electronic products from both countries. The news item on the announcement was published in the leading Israeli newspaper, Ha'aretz.

In the context of things, some of which not related to Malaysia, other matters merit attention also. There is, for example, the following report by a French news agency:

"US Congressmen showed themselves to be increasingly hostile towards Beijing, voting to ban some Chinese officials from the US despite pleas that the action could harm improving relations with China. A week after Chinese President Jiang Zemin held what he considered to be a successful US summit with President Bill Clinton, members of the House of Representatives ridiculed his visit and rejected Clinton's policy of 'constructive engagement' with Beijing."

Even Clinton himself is not spared. Published in a British newspaper was an item about a motion to begin the impeachment of the President being filed in Congress on Nov 5, accusing him of obstruction of justice and abuse of office. This was the procedure used against Richard Nixon in October 1973. "Congressman Bob Barr, a former prosecutor, was backed by 17 Republican colleagues when he asked the House of Representatives to begin an inquiry into the Democratic President that would draft articles of impeachment if it found sufficient damning evidence."

The Congressman, the report explained further, focused on evidence that Clinton and the Democrats allegedly took illegal campaign donations from sources in China.

The move has not, however, found support from his own party leaders. His chairman on the judiciary committee had earlier rejected an impeachment request, saying that he wanted to avoid "empty gestures".

In matters Americana, an explanation of sorts can perhaps be gleaned also by those watching two popular American television shows - The Tonight Show with Jay Leno and the Conan O'Brien show - and for those visiting the US the Late Show with David Letterman. We come then to two American words: tummler and moshing.

Tummler is a noun, meaning "a funmaker ... one who creates a lot of noise but accomplishes little". He's the fellow encouraging the audience to make racket, introduces the orchestra members one by one and now and then dances with a young woman in the audience. Thus, it is explained by an American journalist.

"Moshing" refers to the body banging that goes on in front of the stage during a rock concert. Fans will throw themselves at each other, chest first and both band members and fans will leap off the stage to "surf" the crowd, which happens when the person is carried on the crowd's hands and passed around. The spot where the action takes place is called the "mosh pit".

Unwarranted moshing, excessive whooping and cheering have been described as modern American nuisances. Referred to by an American editor is the behaviour of the audiences of the hugely popular Letterman's Late Show. Exhibited is the "desire to be noticed, to cross the line between audience and performer". Which perhaps explains why a few of the politicians are melodramatic, and there's also the tummler.

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