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Outsiders have lost sense of proportion about local situation

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WHAT has international opinion, in particular the Western-dominated media, come to?

To compare what is happening in Malaysia to apartheid-era South Africa is so offensive, it is obscene. To say the policies of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad are "noxious" (as The Economist has just done) similarly offends not just the Prime Minister but all Malaysians who elected him and strips such commentaries of the veneer of even-handedness such media had striven so hard to project.

International opinion is working overtime to portray Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as the aggrieved underdog bullied by the overbearing might of the Malaysian state. I am starting to wonder if, in trying to do so, outsiders have lost all sense of proportion and are giving Malaysia exactly the same treatment they accuse the country of meting out to Anwar.

If this is indeed what outsiders are setting out to do, I am deeply puzzled.

It is understandable, even expected, if the foreign protests are because of some perceived human rights abuses in Malaysia. But if that were so, we can count on the US State Department to issue an unambiguous official condemnation. Instead, it was a World Bank official issuing veiled threats!

What exactly has Malaysia done to deserve such close scrutiny, even disapproval and the resulting unconventional reactions?

We know the Western world has been deeply unhappy with Malaysia's recent economic pronouncements. But that is within Malaysia's right to do as it pleases. If anything, Malaysia has been pleading for understanding - that this was a decision not easily arrived at - but look at the international reaction.

Could it be that Malaysia is onto something which could ultimately prove right but the stakes for the Western powers-that-be are so high that they cannot afford to have Malaysia proven correct?

So the full might of the Western-dominated international system is brought to bear on Malaysia - the World Bank, the IMF, the media, the ratings agencies, all the so-called financial and market analysts almost down to the last individual, international NGOs and their local offshoots.

I always believe that our Prime Minister's game-plan has been to do as much of the necessary "dirty work" (fighting against various vested interests) as possible to put the country on a sound economic footing and then let his chosen successor proceed with the inevitable political and economic loosening-up.

There will be those who gripe about the Prime Minister's methods but I will be prepared to change my mind if anyone can point to any credible examples where countries achieve economic quantum leaps while simultaneously being nice and agreeable.

Alas, all this is not to be, because of the Asian crisis. The upshot of all this is that we are landed with an unpleasant sense of *deja vu*; the distressing feeling that we have gone through all this before.

To all foreigners in and outside our country, please, if you cannot be helpful, leave us alone to sort through this mess. It is, after all, our country and therefore, our responsibility.