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Anwar's American sympathisers act out of ignorance of the facts

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SURELY they cannot be called "The Magnificent Seven", the seven lawmakers who filed a petition in the US House of Representatives to press for the freedom or retrial of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The seven, advised by their staff and acting in the belief that they were doing the right thing, filed a resolution demanding that Anwar be given "due process" of law. What the advisers failed to inform the seven Congressmen was that Anwar has been provided the due process of law, and that the trial was fair and transparent.

Those who filed the resolution are Chris Smith of New Jersey, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, Tom Lantos, Dana Rohrabacher and Ed Royce of California, Neil Abercombie of Hawaii and Robert Wexler of Florida on Oct 27.

The seven, encouraged by Malaysian supporters of Anwar who should not go unpunished for their action, are the same seven who had filed a resolution in 1998 for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to step down.

In fact, Anwar is appealing and this will present him with another opportunity to state his case, supported by what many believed to be the best legal brains in the profession. It is important to note that Anwar's appeal reflects his faith in the Malaysian judicial system, a point some of his defenders chose to ignore.

It is strongly believed that the filing of the resolution was part of a series of "planned, deliberate and sustained efforts" to discredit the Malaysian Government and cause Malaysia to be ostracised by the rest of the world. But who would want to do such a thing, one might ask.

Well, they comprise locals and foreigners. For example, it is no secret that supporters of Anwar engaged Janus Merritt Strategies (JMS,), a public affairs and government relations firm. JMS specialises in positioning complicated scientific, economic, political and often emotional issues for effective resolution on behalf of its clients.

Research also showed that another foreign supporter of Anwar is Dr Jamal Barazinghi, the Director of International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIT) which has links with Anwar. IIT's founder, the late Ismail Fauraki, was Anwar's mentor and the two would often telephone each other exchanging views. Anwar is known to have often sought advice from the latter.

Then there is the Sulaiman Abdul Aziz Rajai Foundation (SAAR) - a Saudi Arabian outfit which finances the activities of IIT, among others.

Local operators are also working overtime, Abdul Rahim Ghose in Jakarta to initiate attacks on the Malaysian Government while another supporter, Raja Petra Kamaruddin, makes frequent trips overseas canvassing for Anwar. Abdul Rahim was said to be in Australia last month, drumming up support for Anwar.

Both men are closely linked to Anwar and had benefited from several projects awarded to them when Anwar was Finance Minister. They are also linked to Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan), formed to fight Anwar's cause. In late July this year, both launched the Free Anwar Campaign (FAC) and dedicated websites to amplify all negative stories on Malaysia.

The close co-operation between these personalities and parties resulted in a contract being signed between Anwar's supporters (local and overseas) and JMS on 24 August to orchestrate continuous efforts to get international support for Anwar's release.

Funding these operations may not be cheap, but then again, funds do not appear to be an issue here - US\$200,000 (RM760,000) was paid to secure the services of JMS for four months.

The co-directors of JMS are also said to be working for a number of developing countries and organisations. They are Mark J. Robertson and Scott Hoffman. Omar Nashashibi, a Palestinian who is a Research Associate of JMS, also works for the International Campaign for the Preservation of Human Rights (CPHR). He was active in organising protests against Dr Mahathir in Chicago in September and in front of the Malaysian Embassy in Washington on Sept 20.

For the record not more than 20 people participated in the protests.

Research also showed that the JMS were given these briefs:

- * undertake a programme to generate political and economic pressure on the Malaysian Government aimed at freeing Anwar,
- * implement a series of coordinated actions to isolate the Malaysian Government,
- * generate international outrage against Malaysia,
- * introduce sanctions legislation in the US Congress,
- * initiate suspension of military aid to Malaysia,
- * initiate boycott of Malaysian goods,
- * activate grassroots organisations and other organisations in the US to create awareness in Anwar's case by holding panel discussions at think tanks, universities etc.
- * work with Muslim leaders in the US.

Apart from filing the resolution in the US Congress, JMS is known to have actively pursued other activities. They include:

- * holding a luncheon meeting with 11 Muslim staffers to Congressmen at a Chinese Restaurant in Washington DC where a folder containing pro-Anwar documents were distributed;
- * getting the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) to withdraw its invitation for Dr Mahathir to address its Sept 1 convention in Illinois;
- * holding demonstrations in Chicago and Washington DC on Sept 3 and Sept 20;
- * placing some 200 pro-Anwar pamphlets at a table reserved for the private sector section of the Malaysian delegation at the Malaysian Trade Seminar in New York on Sept 25 2000;
- * trying to influence US Presidential candidate George W. Bush;
- * organising a demonstration in Jakarta on Sept 22 ; and
- * initiating a video documentary purportedly on the "corrupt Malaysian judicial system" done by an Australian film crew.

These negative developments were given prominence in local pro-Anwar and FAC websites which are responsible for propelling Anwar into international limelight.

Is JMS a threat? One thing that must be noted is the fact that JMS has failed in many areas perhaps because of its ignorance of Malaysia and the local scene. It relied solely on the FAC's input and was thrown off guard in many instances.

For example, the purported demonstrations failed to convince anyone and were more of disjointed congregations of between 10 and 20 people.

The JMS failed to stop the American Finance House (Lariba) from presenting an award to Dr Mahathir in early September for developing Islamic financial institutions and overcoming the financial crisis in Malaysia without resorting to the IMF.

It failed to stop Dr Mahathir from delivering his keynote address at a conference organised by the Cambridge University Malaysia Society (CUMAS) in Cambridge University on 7 October.

At the moment the seven US Congressmen have only filed the resolution

calling for Anwar to be released. Like all other resolutions, it is unlikely to be adopted.

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