

26/08/2000

Isna's move to withdraw invitation to Dr M serves American purpose

Shamsul Akmar

WHEN wise men of the past came up with the story of the three monkeys which "see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil", they obviously did not take into consideration the present-day explosion of information.

Contemporary humanity, no matter how hard they try, will have information - audio and visual - being thrust upon their existence, regardless of how evil these input may be.

Since the profound nature of the three monkeys is slowly becoming irrelevant, the next best thing to do is to see both sides of the coin and then decide on which is evil.

As such, it is disappointing to see how the Islamic Society of North America (Isna) decided to withdraw its invitation to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to address its convention in Rosemont, Illinois, next week.

In short, Isna has decided to give the three monkeys a run for their money by giving a new dimension to the concept - that is to see, hear and speak half evil.

Or rather, the Isna leaders had become believers of seeing only one side of the coin.

Of course, it is their right to withdraw the invitation to Dr Mahathir.

Yet, the fact remains, why did the organisation make the invitation in the first place?

While this is not explained, the justification put forth by Isna's secretary-general Sayyid M. Syeed was that the invitation was withdrawn because "dozens and dozens" of its members were unhappy with Dr Mahathir's treatment of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He also said that protests might be staged if Dr Mahathir appeared at the gathering to be held from Sept 1-4.

Regardless what the reasons were, Isna's decision had only acted to serve the purpose of American leaders who had been trying very hard to undermine Dr Mahathir and other leaders of Islamic nations who refuse to kneel to their whims and fancy.

If Isna and its members are truly concerned about what had happened to Anwar, wouldn't having Dr Mahathir during the convention a good opportunity to question him on the issue?

However, an opposition leader argued that such a move - to withdraw the invitation - was a good way of protest against Dr Mahathir.

"It is a message to him that the international community is upset with his way of dealing with the Anwar issue."

But the nagging feeling that arises here is, how would Isna leaders reconcile with the fact that they had merely listened to one side of the story?

Does it mean that they have the full understanding of the issue and have made the right judgment merely by listening to those who opposed the Prime Minister?

The next question is, what is their source of information? Most will definitely come from the foreign publications, Internet and supporters of Anwar who, from the very beginning of the issue, had decided that Dr Mahathir is wrong.

Wouldn't Isna members and others present during the convention be more convinced that Anwar is right after getting the opportunity to "grill" Dr Mahathir?

Or, is there fear that they may have to change their mind after the Prime Minister gives his explanation?

Isna, in explaining its raison d'etre, claims to be a "product of the resolve of the Muslims in North America to live an Islamic way of life and to advance the cause of Islam and Muslims there".

Apart from that, its activities include support for better schools, stronger dakwah (missionary) programmes and organising community centres.

It finally claims to be committed to help foster unity among Muslims, which was vital to an Islamic way of life.

It all sounds well and fine, especially the last aspect of its existence.

However, in what way can Isna help foster unity among Muslims when it chooses to accept one side of the Malaysian Muslim political divide and ignore the other?

Regardless of what Isna and the rest of the Muslim community in other parts of the world including Malaysia may feel about Anwar, there are as many supporters for him as there are for Dr Mahathir.

If, the intention of withdrawing the invitation to Dr Mahathir is aimed at snubbing him, then those who support him can't help but be snubbed along the way.

Then, forget about the talk about fostering unity among the Muslims when unity, in so far as Isna is concerned, is only with those who are like-minded or share its sentiments about Anwar.

However, it is also important to understand that most Muslims the world over are more than keen to please the American masters and in many instances, try to emulate Western values and along the way allow themselves to parrot ideals contrary to that of Islam.

A corporate figure, who is a Muslim and a staunch supporter of Dr Mahathir, said:

"Just because Anwar had, when he was in power, set up links with numerous groups in America, that does not mean they should just listen to his side of the story.

"If Isna truly espouses the Islamic way of life, it should listen to what Dr Mahathir has to say. After that, they can make their own judgment.

"But denying him to say his side of the story is a very un-Islamic way."

The corporate figure refused to be identified as he did not want to be seen as someone out there trying to gain a footing in the Malaysian political arena by making statements supporting Dr Mahathir.

There are others like him in Malaysia who are not just expressing support for Dr Mahathir because by doing so, they would be able to climb the political ladder as popularly perceived by the opposition to the Prime Minister.

These are Muslims in Malaysia who feel that Isna's refusal to allow Dr Mahathir to say his piece, is a snub to them as well, and some have not developed the "thick skin" the Prime Minister has.

Then again, why should Isna care about these Muslims? After all, they are the type of Muslims whom the Americans dislike.

And any Muslim the Americans disliked have to be evil, without having to see, hear or speak to them.

(END)