

04/08/2000

Slanted views of Western media

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AS we are busy getting on with our lives, in media offices in the West and in Hong Kong, highly paid strategists have long trained their eyes on Kuala Lumpur, with a particular interest on a verdict to be handed down today.

You don't have to be a lecturer on media and communications like I to be able to piece together the jigsaw.

Their detailed and thorough plans are most eye-catching and cannot be easily missed.

It started with the Far Eastern Economic Review carrying a report in its July 13 issue on a conference organised by the American intelligence community.

They were peering into the "Prospects of a Post-Mahathir Malaysia".

Among the speakers were academics, economists and former American diplomats and journalists in Malaysia, hinting at the "additional" roles of these expatriates.

Their conclusion: Former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim "wasn't necessarily finished".

On July 28, Asiaweek carried three related items. In "Talking Points", it had a damaging "quotation" attributed to Anwar's wife.

Then, it splashed on pages 24 and 25 an article on the upcoming verdict on Anwar's sodomy trial followed by a heavily-slanted piece on the Malaysian police force.

The magazine said the police force had been criticised for "being heavy-handed and unresponsive".

Finally, in "Looking Back", readers were greeted with a huge black and white picture of a youthful Anwar after he was declared winner of the 1982 Umno Youth contest.

Asiaweek ignored the fact that the contest was in September 1982 and this was a July edition. They were looking for impact.

At the same time Newsweek - that American magazine which rarely bothers to report on Malaysia - devoted a column, "Letter from Prison to and for Anwar".

Since Malaysians are nice, gentle people, we didn't hound Newsweek with the most pertinent questions: Was the article solicited?

Did Anwar know anything about it? Did the prison authorities know anything about it?

Or, was this piece a follow-up to the June conference organised by the American intelligence community?

I have often wondered whether the American media is truly free, as they have on occasions compromised their integrity.

We wonder about the role of sections of the American media vis-a-vis the functions of the "intelligence community" which is now given to organising conferences as a mark of their shift to overt operations.

The preference for Anwar is understandable. The West is comfortable with him as he is compliant and speaks their lingo.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, on the contrary, is a strong-willed leader of a prosperous Muslim nation and tends to organise countries of the South into a working, cohesive unit.

This is an irritant for a West bent on bulldozing its will through. Other leaders of the South are routinely discredited.

Alberto Fujimori and Robert Mugabe are not very nice people, according

to the Western media.

From a naive point of view, the West should be happy with Malaysia as it is a stable and harmonious nation.

Just read the coming issues of international magazines. Chances are Time, Newsweek, Asiaweek, Far Eastern Economic Review, Asian Wall Street Journal and possibly Economist are lining up big, full-page coverage on Anwar's trial.

They may have contacted the various personalities to prepare their articles.

The likes of Dr Chandra Muzaffar, Lim Kit Siang, Dr Syed Husin Ali and Ezam Mohd Noor may have already given embargoed interviews to these magazines.

If indeed this is true, it is definitely most revolting. These publications have decided what they are going to write, a guilty verdict or otherwise.