

31/01/2000

(The Harvard Asia Business ... )

Abdullah Ahmad

THE Harvard Asia Business Conference "Asia at the Dawn of the Millennium" held at Harvard Business School, Boston on 28-29 January, at which I was a panellist for two sessions, produced plenty of cheers for what was perceived as East Asia's quick recovery from the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997-98.

Malaysia's example of rejecting the IMF medicine was held up as a success story compared with Indonesia in particular, even Thailand. I told the panel on US Foreign Policy that the outgoing World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz said that the interests of the poor countries had never been adequately represented at international fora.

Stiglitz now agreed, now that he no longer is muzzled, with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that the cause of the Asian financial crisis were the international financial markets that were the root of the problem.

My indictment of the US foreign policy lacking consistency, morality, a litany of double standards and ambivalence was strongly supported by Mr Jerome Cohen, law professor at New York University, the conference's moderator on US Foreign policy towards Asia. Professor Wachman of the Fletcher School of Diplomacy did not disagree.

Cohen said Washington should be consistent about its human rights policy. The US could not have one human rights policy for China while it is mute about Saudi Arabia where human rights does not exist, adding besides even human rights in the US itself needed huge improvements. The panel agreed.

The US non-payment of its debts to the United Nations is "a disgrace and totally unacceptable". Washington's super power status does not entitle it to include non-payment of obligatory dues.

Cohen also condemned Washington's "fuzzy relationships" with China and Taiwan.

At both panels I spoke there were no tears for the sacked former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. Three speakers referred to him briefly when commenting on Malaysia, two only wanted to know the status of his sodomy trial while Cohen said perhaps Anwar should come to Harvard (after he has done his time in jail) following in the footsteps of Ninoy Aquino (the Philippines), Francis Seow (Singapore) and Kim Dae Jung, the President of South Korea.

Douglas Paal (he is Anwar's good friend) though listed as a panellist did not show up. He was described as the president of Asia-Pacific Policy Centre.

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