

Media blinded by bits and pieces

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NO SOONER had Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad finished his address at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysian Consulate-General's office, the UN Permanent Mission and the embassy in Washington began receiving calls protesting against his so-called anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic remarks.

The protests were loudest in New York where there is a big Jewish population.

It was interesting how the media

here played the story. It appeared in the online versions in most newspapers and was carried on Fox News Channel which repeated the story throughout the day.

The *New York Times* carried a three-paragraph report under the heading "Malaysian Attacks Jews" that was basically on the European Union accusing Dr Mahathir of anti-Semitism.

The *Daily News* had the headline "Malay PM calls Jews the puppet masters." The report said Dr Mahathir's comments sent a chill

through US Jewish organisations but it was no surprise to some Arab-American leaders.

Osama Siblani, president of the Arab-American Political Action Committee, said there was confusion between Zionism and Judaism.

"Politically, it's true that Zionists are trying to lead Americans into war," he told the paper.

The *New York Post* carried an Associated Press report under the heading "Echoing Historic Hatred" and also a column by Ralph Peters, the author of the book *Beyond Baghdad: Post-modern War and Peace* that attacked the Prime Minister for his speech.

Despite criticism, Dr Mahathir has stood firm by what he said and many OIC leaders have praised him for his speech.

Someone who read the full text of his address said that it was a good lesson in history.

"People are looking at it as though he is attacking the Jews when in actual fact he is calling on Muslims to wake up to learn from this. There is so much positive advice in his speech and you have to look at it deeper," he said.

Unfortunately, he said, the media took out bits and pieces here and there and distorted the whole picture.

It is evident that many who commented based their remarks on news reports that had sensationalised what Dr Mahathir said.

On the other end of the scale, President George W. Bush is at odds with the mainstream media in the coverage of the ongoing war in Iraq.

He said the news was being "filtered" and that people were not getting the true picture of what was happening on the ground in Iraq.

The relentless criticism of the administration has seen the president's poll numbers fall to pre-Sept 11, 2001.

So worried was the administration over the declining popularity of the President that it decided to have its own publicity blitz, going over

the heads of the mainstream media and talking directly to the people and smaller news organisations to give them the "good side" of things happening in Iraq.

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice was the first to speak on this, followed by the president and then Vice-President Dick Cheney.

Bush has also started meeting people from smaller news organisations to get his message across.

They argued that most of the country was peaceful and that the trouble was around Baghdad and more precisely the Sunni Triangle.

And even as they did this, more and more American soldiers were either being killed or injured. Under such circumstances it was difficult to portray Iraq in a more positive light.

In the US there is freedom of speech at least that's what they tell you. But it is not as simple as that.

This was what Vijay Singh, Asia's best golfer on the lucrative USPGA, learned this year when he was asked whether top woman golfer Annika Sorenstam should be allowed to play in a men-only PGA tournament.

Vijay said that if he were paired with Annika, he would not play in the tournament.

His remarks did not go down well with the media and he became a target of criticism and was even heckled at tournaments.

Vijay has stopped speaking to the press. Instead, he lets his clubs do the talking. It's working well for him as he is the biggest prize money earner behind Tiger Woods so far this year.

It's funny how the media asks you questions and if they don't like your opinion, they will come after you. It's all about saying something politically correct, they say.



**State
Side**

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