

'Anti-Semitism' claim baseless

STAR 29 OCT 2003

NEWS ANALYSIS BY K.K. TAN¹

ANTI-SEMITISM. Now that's a word that's getting a lot of airing in the world today, often accompanied by a lot of hot air and even strong overtones of hysteria. Granted, it's not new but Malaysians are suddenly sitting up and noticing it because the word is being directed at Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad largely by certain Western leaders and media.

Yet the term has been used without any explanation of its basis and background.

What really is the meaning of anti-Semitism and why are so many people getting so worked up by it?

The Semites are people who descended from ancient times in West Asia and North Africa (Middle East) and they included the Jews, Arabs and several others.

Organised anti-Jewish attacks started in the West, especially in Europe before World War Two, when the Jews were perceived to be a "threat to society," especially in Germany.

After the war, the term "anti-

Semitism" was used by certain influential Jewish groups to refer to anything they perceived as anti-Jewish.

This situation has been reinforced over the years until today.

True, there are still xenophobic feelings and attacks against the Jews by white supremacist groups and the extreme right in the West.

Such attacks are indefensible and should be opposed by all right-thinking people.

The right of the Jews to practise their religion and to enjoy equal rights as others should

be defended resolutely.

But the rest of the world and people of other faiths should not be held at ransom by certain groups who use the past sufferings of the Jews (especially the Holocaust) as initial justification for the forced creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the continued oppression of the indigenous Palestinian people and Israel's expansionary policies and acts of aggression.

This is basically what Zionism is all about.

The recent speech by Dr Mahathir at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Kuala Lumpur, where he spoke about his theory of global Jewish domination as part of his wake-up call to Muslims to unite and be smart, has raised a storm in the Western media which has accused him of being anti-Semitic.

For example, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* (AWSJ), an influential regional paper, in its editorial entitled "Hatred and Democracy" on Oct 21 condemned Dr Mahathir for promoting anti-Semitism, racism, hatred against the Jews and using demagoguery in his speech.

The editorial also accused him of the usual stereotypical dictatorial practices of Third World leaders and of upping the Islamic label to satisfy domestic political expediency when his audience was clearly international.

It even implied that the reason he was doing this was to "maintain his power" when the whole world knows he would be stepping down from power voluntarily on Friday.

AWSJ followed up on the editorial with a series of articles along a similar vein; one article said Malaysia would be better off without him.

What's more, these critics even questioned his motives in his speech which urged Muslims to move away from senseless violence and focus on being smart and effective and strive for unity and real peace based on justice.

They became fixated on what he said about Jewish domination and his call to Muslims "to assess our weaknesses and our strengths, to plan, to strategise and then to counter-attack."

But what Dr Mahathir is "counter-attacking" is not Semitism but essentially Zionism.

It should be recalled that the United Nations General Assembly as far back as 1975 condemned Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination under Resolution 3379.

Due to strong pressure from the US and the condition set by Israel for participation in the Madrid

Peace Conference in 1991, this resolution was revoked that year after staying valid for 16 years.

Zionism is a movement and ideology based on the forced creation of a special state, Israel, exclusively for Jews at the expense of Palestinians.

The persecution of the Jews by the Nazis was used as a basis to campaign for such a state.

There has never been a precedent in history of the forced creation of a new state for a particular religious group at a place which has already been populated.

It is worth noting that there are many Jews who have lived and integrated well in other societies and who are firmly opposed to Zionism.

Jewish people are those who profess and practise the religion of Judaism so although some Western historians and social scientists may claim otherwise, the Jews are not a race but a religious group wishing to practise its religion anywhere like everybody else on this planet.

When people criticise Zionism, it is important to understand that they are not criticising the religion but the forced creation of Israel at the expense of Palestinians and Israel's expansionary ambitions and its aggressive policies against its neighbours and other religions.

The proponents of Zionism often deliberately confuse or deflect any criticism or condemnation of Israel's unjust policies with anti-Semitism, exemplified in its worst form by the persecution of Jews by the Nazis.

The post-war Zionist leadership used the Holocaust as a licence to commit any acts on any people it chooses and anyone who dares to oppose its policy would be implicated in the past persecution of Jews.

The emotional over-reaction of many Jews to perceived "anti-Semitic" views is largely due to their inability up to today to come to terms with their past and comprehend fully the horrors of the persecution of their ancestors at the hands of the Nazis, which somehow the rest of the world is also implicated in for "allowing" this part of history to take place.

Are Dr Mahathir's critics saying that the Israeli or Zionist leadership cannot be criticised for any of its past and present wrongdoings including acts of aggression, senseless killings and illegal land annexations?

Anti-Jewish views in the West, wrong as they are, are often equated with anti-Semitism and portrayed as being "racist" as well.

Let's define and understand