

Anwar: Apco is about 'haphazard spending'
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The Apco issue is not simplistically about who came up with the 1Malaysia concept but the lack of transparency in the government's "haphazard" spending of RM77 million to hire a foreign company with an "unhealthy track record" of working with an oppressive regime.

In saying this, Anwar Ibrahim, the de facto opposition leader, pointed out in a statement today that the issue fundamentally revolves around "the lack of responsibility of a prime minister in ignoring Apco's track record" and a lack of accountability in spending public money for the image building of his own party.

Anwar, (right) also Permatang Pauh MP, was suspended from Parliament for six months for bringing up the issue of Apco's link between '1Malaysia' and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's 'One Israel'.

The opposition leader called Apco's "deep involvement" in Najib's administration "proof of Umno/BN's hypocrisy" in light of the latter's "incessant propaganda" to portray him as a Jewish agent.

He questions why a firm "known for its strong links with the Israeli intelligence and political establishment" is allowed to manage one of the government's most influential functions, that is communications.

"Therefore, the bulk of my contention when I first raised this issue in the Dewan Rakyat was directed at the prime minister's hypocrisy and carelessness in hiring a firm with a track record such as Apco's.

"It is only natural that Pakatan Rakyat MPs requested for the government to come clean on the extent of Apco's involvement in the formulation of policies and messaging under the current prime minister," said Anwar.

"Thus, the issue was never about the simplistic question of who came up with 1Malaysia. It is about holding the government of the day accountable," he said.

Apco affidavit 'not proof'

Anwar blasted his suspension and that of three other Pakatan MPs as the culmination of Najib's "overkill drive" to avoid scrutiny and discussion and accountability on the hiring of the American public relations firm.

He also ridiculed Umno's latest claims that Apco's letter of denial and Robert M Shrum's statement constituted proof that Apco was not involved in One Israel, as "orchestrated media play".

"In a normal court of law, such 'evidence' would have to stand the scrutiny of cross examination to ensure that they are credible and acceptable for the purpose of a case.

"No court or parliamentary committee of a respectable standing would have dismissed a case and arrived at a biased verdict purely on account of two letters produced by the prosecutor," said Anwar.

He added that such a logic would imply that P Balasubramaniam's statutory declaration on his allegation of the prime minister's relationship with Altantuya Sharibu would also constitute indisputable proof.

"Likewise, the two contracts signed by Apco with the governments of Malaysia and Israel respectively that are in my possession would have to be taken as an undisputable proof of a link between the 1Malaysia campaign with other campaigns that Apco or its personnel had worked on previously," he said.

Anwar accused Najib of trying to avoid fundamental questions surrounding the hiring of Apco, such as those raised by a news portal's article on July 28 last year entitled "Money being splurged to boost image of Najib's administration" that he said the government has never officially denied.

Anwar quoted paragraphs from the article that said: "It is understood that the services of Apco Worldwide was brought in by Omar Mustapha, the close aide of the PM who was recently embroiled in controversy over his proposed appointment to the board of national oil company, Petronas.

"Apco Worldwide is understood to have had an official based in Najib's office since the early days of his administration.

"Apco and other public relations specialists from the United States have also been helping Najib craft his 100 days strategy. This includes his 1Malaysia message and other key platforms of his administration."

Anwar said, "If this is indeed true, the prime minister must then be prepared to explain the other fundamental issue - his trigger-happy attitude in using taxpayers' money to hire a firm for the sole good of his party."