

**The capricious turns of Chandra Muzaffar**  
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COMMENT There was a time when Dr Chandra Muzaffar gave a good name to the designation 'intellectual' in Malaysian political discourse.

His ability to illuminate principle with wide knowledge made him, at one time, one of our leading public intellectuals.

Young, politically conscious Malaysians coming of age in the time from the late 1970s to the onset of the reformasi movement two decades later just had to read him in journals or listen to him at forums to get a good grasp of issues sparking in the political arena.

His limpid intellect and lucid exposition made him the go-to person for illumination on the issues of the day.

When in 1999 he became deputy president of Parti Keadilan Nasional, forerunner of the present PKR, it seemed the logical culmination to a two decade-long exertion on behalf of the cause of building a strong, democratic opposition in Malaysia.

But after he departed the party in the early 2000s, for reasons not as clear as one would expect from someone with his gift for vividness, he began to take inexplicable stances the more strange for it being so jarringly at odds with his prior ones.

In a maverick like blogger Raja Petra Kamarudin, who has always reveled at deploying a tantalising blend of half-truths and seductive fictions couched in sensation-stoking stories, such diametric reversals can be expected - the consequence, one would think, of an a priori stance in which a lurking sense of mischief is the hint the author is more keen on pulling your leg than in making a case.

But in an exponent of reasoned argument in the context of a stable worldview, volte-faces such as Chandra has executed in recent years put one in mind of what Gestapo founder Hermann Goering said (substitute 'intellectual' for 'culture'): "When I hear the word culture, I reach for my revolver."

No doubt Ralph Waldo Emerson is correct that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," but Chandra's about-turns in recent years have given a promiscuous tinge to what it means to be an intellectual.

Anwar as PM an 'unmitigated disaster'

The development of a coherent worldview which one would then apply with imagination and flair to any subject matter ipso factor precludes randomness in choice of positions on the opinion-spectrum.

The habit of persuasion through reasoned argument, the hallmark of an intellectual, necessarily entails that one takes up a position by studious argumentation and only abandons it on pain of collision with brute facts.

Chandra's opinions an election season ago on Anwar Ibrahim and in this poll season on regime change in Malaysia have a capricious rather than a cogitated quality to them.

To say, as he did, at a public forum just days before the March 8, 2008 general election, that Anwar as prime minister would be "an unmitigated disaster" would have been comparable to, say, if Olivier Tambo had voiced the view when a newly released Nelson Mandela was negotiating with FW de Klerk during South Africa's transition from an apartheid state to a democratic one that a Mandela presidency would be

a colossal catastrophe for the country.

One concedes that this comparison is not quite on the same level in analogical terms, but it is close. The opinion of Chandra that Anwar as PM would be an “unmitigated disaster” rang as clangorously as a fire bell in the night.

The choice of words and the timing of their expression had about them a warehouse quality.

If Chandra had said something more nuanced and said it at a time well before the election, it could have plausibly passed as a revision, a reconsideration of opinions he must have held when he made common cause with Anwar at the beginning of the reformasi period following Anwar’s expulsion from Umno and the BN government.

But aired just when it seemed things were going badly for the ruling coalition, the opinion exuded the perfidious stench of such nasty surprises in history as the Nazi-Soviet pact on the eve of the Second World War.

One would think that the opinion’s ineffectuality in influencing the tide against BN in 2008, culminating in an Anwar-led opposition’s historic denial of a two-thirds majority to the BN, would have had Chandra suitably chastened and thereafter appropriately cautious.

Instead, on the evidence of his latest offering that appeared in Malaysiakini earlier this week, he is driven to further contortions, conjuring up the appellation “deep state” to describe the surreptitious designs of an allegedly dominant force in US politics that wants Barack Obama to favour Anwar Ibrahim over Najib Razak as prime minister of Malaysia because this would further Israeli dominance over Palestinians in the Middle East and facilitate China’s encirclement by Washington-subservient states in Asia.

Conspiracy theories

One would have thought conspiracy theories of history, greatly enamoured by the spinmeisters of the Cold War era of a decidedly Leninist streak, would have died the death of a thousand refutations with the fall of the Iron and Bamboo curtains of two decades ago.

Obama, whom the alleged “deep state” could not force into helping the green revolution in Iran in mid-2009; whom Nicholas Sarkozy and David Cameron had virtually to shame into tardy help in getting rid of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya; who won’t help Syrian rebels just now being pulverised by Bashar Assad in Homs; who on Monday would be telling Benjamin Netanyahu that sanctions and the credible threat of force are better weapons than a unilateral military strike to prevent Iran going nuclear, is keen on Malaysia’s compliance with a policy of encirclement of China!

Hence the “deep state” in the US would prefer that Islamic chameleon Anwar Ibrahim who secretly loves Jews and the West to the English-educated but hegemon-wary Najib Razak as PM of Malaysia.

When left-wing intellectuals attempted to justify Stalin’s murderous excesses by saying that “you have to break eggs to make an omelette”, that clear-eyed intellectual George Orwell tersely rebutted, “What omelette?”

A country steadily growing insolvent from serial corruption and from advanced misgovernment under the impact of a half-century’s unchallenged rule by Umno-BN has more urgent matters to worry about - like the purchase of unneeded submarines that won’t sink - than concerns of whether it is a proxy in alleged big power schemes.

“Malaysia a big power proxy?” is like the “omelette” of Stalin’s apologists, a self-aggrandising fiction to muddle giddy minds.

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