

## **COMMENT | How Anwar trapped himself in Palestinian quagmire**

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“Have we pawned the pride of Muslims in matters concerning Israel just for the sake of money and trade?”

- Amanah MP Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah Raja Ahmad, 2018

COMMENT | Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim’s comments on the economic justification of doing business with Israeli-linked companies operating outside of Israel are demonstrative of the damage antisemitic narratives of mainstream Malaysian politics have wrought over the decades when it comes to political and social cohesion.

The context of the quote that opens this piece is the visit by an Israeli delegation to a United Nations-sponsored event in Kuala Lumpur.

Amanah MP Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah Raja Ahmad also said - “Just days after the deputy prime minister sent home 12 Uighur Muslims back to China on the pretext of maintaining ‘good relations’ between the two countries, what has become of Muslim dignity and pride in the country?”

Political operatives from either side of the divide, Muslim and non-Muslim, like to claim that the Palestinian issue is an important matter to all Malaysians.

First of all, in the Malaysian context, we are divided along racial and religious lines, and accorded special privileges depending on which race and religion we belong to.

So, claiming that Malaysians respond to this issue as equal citizens is misleading.

### **Views on Jews**

Everything most Malays are taught about the Palestinian conflict, they get from National Civics Bureau (BTN) courses and state-sponsored sermons in mosques.

This is why PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang gets to say something like this -  
“When Umno and PAS unite, they are accused of wishing to go to war with other races.

“(Our accusers are) like the Jews who did not want Muslims to be united during the Prophet’s time.

“This is a disease we must fight. Let’s join forces and send the enemy to hell.”

He was alluding to DAP leaders, in case you missed it.

Keep in mind that Hadi has claimed that he was willing to work with Jews but not Zionists, which exposes the statement he made about the Umno/PAS marriage, for the horse manure that it is.

Here in Malaysia, being a Jew and being a Zionist is not mutually exclusive.

Consider the hate speech of Muslim convert Ridhuan Tee Abdullah, a preacher, who took anti-Semitism to a new level by comparing his Chinese brothers and sisters to the most obscene stereotype of Jews, pleading special knowledge about their community since he was a kafir (infidel) like them before embracing Islam.

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad claimed that the Jews are “crooks” - “(So) what is the reason we don’t allow Israelites to come here? We say they are crooks (penyangak), and we just got rid of one crook.”

### **Blackrock business**

Former Umno minister Khairy Jamaluddin who has nothing to lose, pontificated about how the cabinet would not endorse this Blackrock deal.

But back in the day when he was Umno Youth chief, Khairy was protesting then-US state secretary Condoleezza Rice and chanting "Israel is a wild beast. Israel is the devil!" while burning effigies of then-US president George W Bush.

This idea that spreading hate for the "Jews" makes good capital is what every Islamic political party in this country does. Except, of course, when the real world intrudes and Islamists are made to understand that you cannot expect to be part of the international community and think you are exempt from certain rules.

The prime minister said, "We have no means in the current situation to cancel (ties) because it will impact the country's economy."

However, former PKR stalwart Tian Chua said "rejecting Blackrock is a moral imperative. The government must show policy consistency in its stand for Palestine".

Mind you, Chua, like the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, prattles on about ethical choices when it comes to boycotts hence nobody needs to make the ethical choice of throwing away their Apple gadget or not fly on Boeing aircraft.

Does it seem to you, like it does to me, that "targeted boycotts" merely mean "convenient" boycotts?

Now these very same forces that the prime minister encouraged with his unabashed support for Hamas and claims that he was the target of powerful interest for his support of the Palestinian issues, have come home to roost.

The current Umno Youth chief, who seems to be the Teflon kid when it comes to state security apparatus, said: "We fully support the actions of the government that has expressed strong, undivided support for the Palestinian people, but we ask for solidarity not only at the international level, it must be demonstrated in our own country."

Dr Muhamad Akmal Saleh has already demonstrated that he really does not give a fig about the economic consequences of his call for boycotts hence his stand on this issue is well predictable. This is what happens when you propagandise a conflict using race and religion.

### **Optics matter**

The quagmire is that the Malay political establishment is in a bind. Nobody can come out and support deals with Israeli-linked companies even though it is an economic plus for this country because this would mean betraying the Palestinian cause and Muslim solidarity.

Political secretary to the finance minister Muhammad Kamil Abdul Munim said of Khairy - "We are among the most vocal in defending and advocating for the rights of the Palestinians.

"As such, labelling the prime minister as an accomplice of Israel's genocidal crimes is extreme and disrespectful."

This, however, misses the point.

This is a competition about who defends the Palestinian cause better for a local audience. And in case the prime minister hasn't noticed, he is playing a rigged game that the state (and him) created decades ago. This isn't about the Palestinian people.

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