

COMMENT | Is Anwar really surprised at Palestinian backlash?

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“And another thing, if we are authoritarian, you can’t even live here, let alone become an MP in the country. Respect the rights of the majority in the country before you ask for your freedom of speech to be respected!”

- Umno Youth chief Dr Muhamad Akmal Saleh

COMMENT | The worldwide condemnation of average citizens of the atrocities against the Palestinian people is rooted in secular humanist values.

People who are protesting against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu regime's genocidal acts in Gaza and the West Bank think of everyone as equals - deserving of the same rights and pursuit of happiness as everyone else. Can the same be said of the protests here in Malaysia?

More importantly, just as they condemn the Netanyahu regime’s barbarity, they also condemn the violence inflicted on the Jewish people by groups which have not earned the democratic mandate of the Palestinian people (yes, there have

been no elections for decades) claiming to fight for the Palestinian cause.

Can the same be said of the condemnation of the violence in Gaza here in Malaysia?

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim wonders why there is a backlash against airlifting Palestinians to this country.

However, one also wonders why are we bringing these poor souls here when Egypt has the facilities to handle these shell-shocked and traumatised victims.

While the prime minister accuses critics of this move as lacking compassion, the reality is that this move could also be portrayed as self-serving and politically motivated.

After all, the prime minister said this - "I hope they can open their mind a little bit because we are the first country in Asia that brings in the injured Palestinians for treatment."

Is it important and to whom, that Malaysia is the first country in Asia to do this?

Indeed, the prime minister highlights the symbolic nature of this move when he said: "We are just helping 40 or 50 injured Palestinians... what is this compared

to the 40,000 others who have been violently killed by Israel in Gaza?”

So, this begs the question, why carry out this move when thousands are suffering in Gaza? Who does this actually serve?

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.

The Malaysian divide

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 and this is a cabinet decision of equals is misleading.

The prime minister made this point although he probably did not intend to when he said that Malaysia's economy would be affected if Malaysia cut ties with all Israeli-linked companies: "In Sungai Bakap, okay we can fight, but on the issue of Gaza, Muslims especially in Malaysia, let us unite. If you want to score political points, this is not the place."

Why "Muslims especially in Malaysia"? The suffering of the Palestinians transcends religion or it should but in the geopolitical game, both Jewish and

Palestinian victimhood are contextualised on religious grounds.

It is this kind of hypocrisy by the political elites that defines the Palestinian struggle here in Malaysia. Keep in mind that Khairy Jamaluddin accused Anwar of being complicit in the genocide of Palestinians because of the Blackrock deal.

He had to be reminded by the prime minister's political secretary of "...pretending to not know of Blackrock's hold on Bursa Malaysia since the 1990s, and now is the second-largest shareholder in the Malaysian stock market." And did Blackrock founder Larry Fink only become a Zionist after Oct 7 and before that, he was a Wahhabi?

Anti-Semitism in Malaysia

Anti-Semitism is mainstream in Malay politics. Anything wrong with the Muslim world is blamed on the Jews. We have hosted despotic theocratic regimes.

We have welcomed religious tyrants. We have courted religious fanatics. We have embraced religious extremists who mock the religions of the non-Muslims in this country.

In 2018, when an Israeli delegation came to Malaysia for a United Nations-sponsored event, a Pakatan Harapan MP wondered if the Malaysian government

at the time under former prime minister and now felon Najib Abdul Razak was having an affair with Israel.

Of course, the great irony is that the Israeli delegation liked what they saw in Malaysia, with David Roet (formerly Israel's deputy ambassador to the UN) tweeting: "Found many similarities between Israelis and Malaysian(s). A multifaceted society of people from different backgrounds working together for a better future."

Anti-Semitism is also directed at non-Muslims and their political parties. Keep in mind what PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang said in 2019 about the backlash against the PAS and Umno link-up:

"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."

What underlines this backlash - which is the hypocrisy, bigotry, racism, and doublespeak of the political class - is less important than what defines the politics of the Palestinian issue in this country, which is not about Palestinian suffering but rather political propaganda. The prime minister is too astute a politician not to know this.

Hence, his bewilderment at the backlash is as calculated as the images of Palestinians in Tengku Mizan Military Hospital.

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