

Crucial to know the difference
Malaysiakini.com
July 02, 2010

COMMENT The art of leaving good enough alone requires foresight, but the art of leaving bad enough alone demands clairvoyance.

That makes it a rare art indeed and Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim may be forgiven for not having mastered it.

When Anwar heard that Apco Worldwide were communications consultants to the Malaysian government, his network of informers did some sleuthing.

NONEThe result: a speech in Parliament last March in which he linked the Najib Razak administration's '1Malaysia' policy to former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's 'One Israel' concept.

That claim was dynamite that could blow another hole in the already shaky flanks of Prime Minister Najib's government.

On being threatened with suspension for misleading Parliament, Anwar substantiated his claims in a second speech, this time backed up with documentary evidence.

Nowhere did Anwar cast aspersions on the Jewish identity of some of Apco's luminaries; he merely highlighted Apco's association with the world's more despicable rulers, like the late Sani Abacha of Nigeria and Narendra Modi of Gujarat.

The nub of Anwar's case was: what is a government that is supposed to keep Palestinian-oppressing Israel at arm's length doing consulting with a company with close ties to Tel Aviv?

By bringing up the issue Anwar was placing in jeopardy his stature - more valued abroad than at home - as credible interlocutor between the Muslim world and the west.

Anwar's links with strong supporters of Tel Aviv among neo-conservative intellectuals in Washington had long made him an easy target of the demagoguery that sees Zionist designs under any facade.

Apco, with its ties to Jewish lobbies in Washington, had the reach to do down Anwar's credibility as intermediary between two antagonistic worlds by imputing anti-Semitism to him.

A 'banana peel' issue

Anti-Semitism is one of those 'banana peel' issues: most traffickers in world affairs get to trip up on it some time.

The wise steer clear of it, but alas, wisdom is the property of observers, not of agents of action.

After having put a blow-torch to Apco's trail in March, restraint rather than reaction by Anwar would have been wiser when importunate history intruded in the form of the humanitarian aid flotilla to Gaza.

Tel Aviv chose to intercept the flotilla, a number of deaths ensued and once again the post-Cold War world's most incendiary issue shed its noxious fumes.

The Muslim world was incandescent with rage.

Anwar decided to lead a demonstration at the American embassy in Kuala Lumpur against US support for Israel.

Soon enough think-tanks in Washington and New York began receiving disturbing reports of Anwar's 'latent' anti-Semitism.

An Anwar trip to Washington in late June, to deliver prescheduled speeches, doubled as a fence-mending exercise.

It transpired matters hinged on what is understood by the term 'Zionism': in some circles, it means the necessity of a homeland for the Jews in the Middle East; in less friendly perceptions, the term connotes imperialism.

There lies the rub. Anwar is comfortable with being anti-Zionist which is not the same thing as being anti-Semitic.

By not being clairvoyant about the fallout from Tel Aviv's interception of the aid flotilla, the smudging of the difference between the two terms in the resulting miasma has boomeranged on Anwar.

Now an improbable combination of friends and enemies of Tel Aviv and pretenders to such enmity have combined to target Anwar.

In straits like this, nuanced definitions are the first casualties.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/136179>