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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak addresses the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly at the UN in New York on Thursday. Reuters pic

Making a mountain out of a molehill

UNJUST: In the eyes of his political foes, nothing our prime minister does is right

BY sheer coincidence, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was slated to speak immediately after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had his time at the rostrum in the United Nations General Assembly hall last week. When he finished, both leaders bumped into one another outside the hall, and perhaps, as gentlemen would, extended their handshakes. Someone snapped a picture of them at that very moment, and all hell broke loose in Malaysia.

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As one who was there, my guess would be that Netanyahu did not listen to Najib's statement at the General Assembly in its entirety. He was already out of the hall when Najib spoke. Still, the Israeli press milked every drop from the moment the two leaders bumped into one another, as if to say that Malaysia's relations with the only country still listed as a "no go" in its passport was thawing.

The truth is that Najib, in his statement, followed up with the atrocities

committed by the Israeli Defence Forces on Muslim worshippers in Jerusalem immediately after highlighting the increasing danger posed by the Islamic State militants.

The Zionist regime is, in short, still in Malaysia's bad books, and there isn't a shred of indication to say that is changing anytime soon. But, for Najib's political foes in Malaysia, open season has been declared on the prime minister for a while now. Nothing that he does seems right, and the photograph of him with Netanyahu was a fresh magazine of ammunition.

There were even those who said Najib would be arrested once he set foot in America for 70th session of the UN General Assembly last week. It seemed every security agency in America was keen on questioning him. And there are many such agencies in America, although the one frequently mentioned were those occupants of the J. Edgar Hoover building at 935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW in Washington DC, the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Due to the frequency of such threats being mentioned by Najib's political foes and the manner in which the stories were woven, even I did entertain

the possibility of such a ludicrous incident happening. For a while, I thought those officers from the security agencies would be swarming around the Westchester County airfield in North Plains, just north of New York City, waiting for Najib's plane to land.

All these wild thoughts while I waited for him to arrive at the hotel at which he was to stay, a stone's throw away from the Columbus Circle subway station in midtown Manhattan and the southern tip of New York's Central Park.

But, Najib did arrive as scheduled. Looking fresh and relaxed, and asking the usual question he asks of Malaysian newsmen whenever he is overseas, "Bila sampai?". And for the next few days that he was there, it was all business for Najib.

In between his engagements at the UN, he met with some American business people at the hotel, later with heads of government involved in investigating the criminal downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in Ukraine last year to bring the culprits to book, then with 300 Malaysians at a tea party at the Malaysian mission to the UN, before finally taking up his slot at the UN General Assembly Hall.

Somewhere within those meetings, he did say that when he gets home from the working visit, he expected to see at least a draft of the 2016 Budget speech on his table at the office. Najib is scheduled to table the Budget at the next Parliament sitting, which is just around the corner. "I do not want to be distracted," he told a breakfast meeting of fund managers one morning.

And what of him bumping into

Netanyahu outside the General Assembly hall? I would hazard a guess by saying that perhaps Najib felt more awkward than anything else. Anybody could have been caught in such a situation. It reminded me of my own unplanned encounter, co-incidentally also with an Israeli leader, the former prime minister, the late Yitzhak Rabin. Except in my case, it was more life-threatening than an awkward feeling.

At an international conference in snow-laden Davos in Switzerland sometime in late 1995, I saw an open elevator door at a hotel. In a hurry to go to the upper floors, I rushed for the door, only to find myself surrounded in a flash by some very well-armed security guards.

The elevator was apparently kept open for Rabin, who by then was approaching from the lobby. Fortunately, those Israeli security officers guarding their prime-minister were not as trigger-happy as the Zionist soldiers in the Occupied Territories in Palestine.

For the record, Rabin himself was fatally shot by one of his own not long thereafter. His period was one where the chance of lasting peace came the closest ever between Israel and Palestine, especially after his signing of the Oslo Accords.

Today, Malaysia remains strongly opposed to actions by the Tel Aviv government against the Palestinians, more so as the state is now under the government of the hawkish Netanyahu. It will take a lot more than Najib bumping into him to change that.

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