

Gore cooks up storm at Apec business dinner

KUALA LUMPUR: US VicePresident Al Gore caused a stir at the Apec Business Summit dinner when he took a swipe at the Malaysian Government by praising the *reformasi* movement.

His speech was later described by International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz as "the most disgusting speech I have ever heard" for condoning riots and street demonstration.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who also attended the dinner, declined to comment but was overheard telling some business leaders outside the PWTC: "I've never seen anybody so rude. Even the New Zealand PM (Jenny Shipley) felt bad."

Gore, who was the only speaker at the dinner, had said that among nations suffering economic crises, "we continue to hear calls for democracy in many languages, people's power, *Doi Moi* (Vietnamese for reforms), *reformasi*."

"We hear them today - right here, right now - among the brave people of Malaysia," Gore said.

Gore also touched on the need to provide citizens with democratic rule in order for them to root out corruption and cronyism.

"(It will also) support fair regulation that protects consumers and businesses, to press for sustainable development that protects the environment, to gain access to education and health care, to uphold impartial justice and the rule of law.

"Citizens who launch these reforms will help their countries prosper - as investors put their money and their faith in democracy, and pull it out of nations where decisions were rigged, where bloated bureaucracies sustain only themselves, where contacts are not honoured, and where government swallows up tax revenues without working for the people," he stressed.

"And in too many places, democratic institutions have

not caught up with democratic aspirations. Instead, we find cronyism, corruption and social unrest - adding to the problem of attracting world investment," he said.

His caustic remarks came a day after US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had an open confrontation over Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's case with Rafidah.

Rafidah Aziz, who also attended the function at the Putra World Trade Centre here, said:

"And I hope I never live to hear another one again like that. We do expect lectures when leaders come and make speeches but not to run down a country and to incite things.

"We are doing our best in this part of the world. We do not play politics with economic recovery," a clearly incensed Rafidah said.

She added that Gore's speech had "spoilt the whole Apec meeting and Abec functions."

● TURN TO PAGE TWO

Rafidah: Others also disgusted by Gore

● FROM PAGE ONE

"During the course of the dinner, I had American and other friends from Apec, the business sector, the official sector, who came to us and practically apologised and they were disgusted as well.

"I can imagine the embarrassment of the US community here, they are totally flabbergasted.

"Well, I suppose we have to expect it. There are narrow-minded people in this world and we

have to expect it, but certainly, it reflects unabashed intervention into local affairs," she said.

When asked whether the Government would lodge an official protest, she said: "We haven't met as a government yet, but speaking as a person, a member of the Government, it is totally disgusting."

On the US\$5bil (RM19bil) aid package announced by the United States and Japan, Rafidah said: "I don't care, to me it is not worth five sen."

"For heaven's sake, try to understand what is really going on in this country before you open your mouth and put your big foot into it," she added.

After his 20-minute speech, an unsmiling Gore offered a brief handshake to Dr Mahathir. Gore then shook hands with the six other leaders at the table and left.

According to Reuters, the White House later said that Gore's com-

ments reflected the views of President Bill Clinton, who skipped the Apec summit to monitor a standoff with Iraq over weapons inspections.

Gore, whose speech was distributed to the media covering the Apec meetings at 8pm, also made a reference to Suharto's downfall in Indonesia which he linked to widening calls all over for democracy and categorically stated that "the message this year from Indonesia is unmistakable".