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Al Gore's `reformasi' message was loud and clear

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THE outgoing American ambassador to Kuala Lumpur expressed "shock" at the outrage of Malaysians over the disparaging remarks and call to violence by his Vice President, Al Gore.

Claiming that Malaysians ignored the overall message for "democracy" by Gore, Mr John Malott added that "we would never condone people who use violence to achieve political ends".

One wonders whether "Marott", as the Japanese would call him, was paying attention to his vice president's speech. The Ambassador was seen on his cellular phone outside the hall where Al Gore made the "unwarranted" "provocative" and "abhorrent" remarks.

The message in Gore's speech was loud and clear. No one could have mistaken or misunderstood it. It was a clear interference in the internal affairs of a democratic and independent country.

Malott said that people should not ignore the overall message and argues that "Everyone is focusing on one sentence". But surely if the Americans had wanted to get their "overall message" heard and understood, then Gore would not have insulted his Malaysian hosts with remarks in which he expressed support for the reformasi movement in the manner he did.

The US, the world's largest economy and the only super power in a unipolar world, is flexing its muscles. The remarks by Gore and those by the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright coupled with their behaviour while in Malaysia, must surely have been well planned and rehearsed.

The Americans are known to be particular about their actions and nothing is done without careful calculation and a motive and nothing is left to chance. Thus one cannot but conclude that Gore's remarks and actions were clearly "well thought out and calculated".

As Tan Sri Razali Ismail, the respected former President of the United Nations General Assembly, said: "No doubt about it, Al Gore and Madeleine Albright came to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit to cause us damage".

According to a regional news report there was "internal debate about any action by the US in Malaysia possible being counter-productive". The same report says that "... Washington had worked behind the scenes to discuss the Malaysian issues with Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) members and also provided moral backing with statements of support for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim". Is one to conclude then that the US is behind the "reformasi" movement.

According to a report in the Singapore Straits Times, the US Administration had "thought very hard" about how the US should interact with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and had even discussed the timing of the remarks.

To add insult to injury Malott now says "Let's calm down and have a friendly and open discussion. Let's not shout back and forth". Does he expect the majority of peace loving Malaysians to just sit back and take the deafening insults from the US leadership?

Surely Malott and his proud and independent countrymen would not accept any suggestions from visitors inciting the "brave" minority who are unhappy with the leadership in America to take to the streets seeking an overthrow of its democratically elected Government. Why would it expect others to do so?

Perhaps Washington thinks, as Razali alluded to, that the US bilateral

relations with Malaysia can be sacrificed. Or is it that they are too strong to be adversely affected by Gore's "uneducated, ill-informed and arrogant" remarks and behaviour.

Or could it be that the Americans feel that this is the best time to hit and undermine Malaysia and its leadership which has not been spared by the financial contagion and the Asian flu. With its economy weakened, it is vulnerable and perhaps this is the best time to "attack it".

Dr Mahathir is certainly not on the popularity list of the Americans. He is credited for being "too articulate" and "one with a mind of his own". He calls a spade a spade and perhaps the most irritating and frustrating thing to the Americans is that he does not "kow tow" to them. He is certainly not the "international darling".

If anyone needed a clear indicator of American and foreign interference in Malaysia's internal affairs, there were examples galore last week with the actions and remarks of the US representatives, including Gore, at the Apec meetings. Gore and Albright were not only downright rude and ignorant, they were also arrogant.

However this will not be the first time that the US has tried to destabilise and undermine countries and their leaders in this region as they have done in other parts of the world.

The Central Intelligence Agency tried to destabilise Sukarno in Indonesia for years and finally succeeded. Then they helped to overthrow Suharto and Marcos. Increasingly East Asia appears to be the new challenge for the US in terms of Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilisations".

With the economies of the region and especially those of the Islamic countries - Malaysia and Indonesia - weakened, it is perhaps an opportunity not to be missed for the Americans.

The US officials had over several weeks continued to needle Kuala Lumpur with their statements including those by Secretary of Defence William Cohen and Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin.

Among others, they "sought a fair trial" for Anwar and expressed "deep concern" for the former Deputy Prime Minister who is being tried in an open court. On the same score one wonders how Panama's General Manuel Noriega is being treated in the American prison? Is he not entitled to a fair trial?

Perhaps the human rights organisations, Amnesty International and others included, should be equally concerned and express their "deep concern" for Noriega. There is all the more reason to do so as the US human rights record is nothing to be proud of.

A recent report by Human Rights Watch concluded that the increasing use of "prisons within prisons" in the US leads to numerous human rights abuses and frequent violations of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. And this in the country that preaches human rights to others.

The report points out that the states have been "quite creative in designing their own "maxi-maxis" and in making the conditions particularly difficult to bear. The inmates are also kept under extremely harsh conditions.

Increasingly, the unipolar world is being subjected to the whims of the sole superpower. It has appointed itself as the world's policeman and is increasingly behaving like "an international gangster".

No right thinking Malaysian will sit back and take the insults even if they are not the "international darlings". So Malott the seasoned diplomat should not be "shocked" with the reaction of the "silent majority" in Malaysia to his vice president's uncalled for remarks.

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