

16 NOV 1998

APEC-NEWS-GORE

GORE CAUSES STIR AT APEC DINNER

By: E. Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 16 (Bernama) -- U.S. vice-president Al Gore, who was given the honour to address an Apec Business Summit dinner here, caused a stir at the gathering when he used the occasion to express support for the anti-government "Reformasi" movement.

Touching on the issue towards the end of the speech, he stunned the diners who included more than 1,000 top-level government officials and captains of industry from the Pacific Rim when he spoke about democracy and democratic movements in certain nations.

He even alluded to the notion that democracies had done better than in "nations where freedom is suppressed."

Saying that democracy conferred a stamp of legitimacy that reforms must have in order to be effective, he said calls for democracy had continued, especially among nations suffering from economic crisis.

"We hear them today -- right here, right now -- among the brave people of Malaysia," he said much to the surprise of the diners, especially among Malaysians. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was also present at the dinner held in the Putra World Trade Centre tonight.

Gore said the future of free and robust global market depended strongly on a third challenge -- democracy and the growth of self-government around the world.

He also said any government that suppressed information would suppress the economic potential of the Information Age.

Gore also took a swipe at countries that imposed fiscal discipline and financial sacrifice to weather economic storms and spark growth in an apparent reference to Malaysia's exchange control measures.

Elaborating on democracy, he said people could accept sacrifice in a democracy not only because they have had a role in choosing it, but because they rightly believe they are likely to benefit from it.

Gore also said that President Bill Clinton and him had been working hard to make the American government work better and cost less, applying the lessons of private sector management through a programme of streamlining, reform and targeted deregulation called Reinventing Government.

Gore, however, made no mention about democracy in his own country which human rights group Amnesty International has declared as having among the highest number of human rights violations in the world.

A Malaysian businessman, who was incensed over the remarks, described the American official's statement and the U.S. stance as "interfering in Malaysia's internal affairs."

"It is an outright violation on the sovereignty of our country," he said.

The businessman, who declined to be named, said Gore did not realise that as he spoke, more than 1.7 million people are in prisons or jail in the U.S. with more than 60 percent of them from ethnic minorities.

A Russian businessman presently at the dinner felt that Gore's remarks would definitely elicit a response from Dr Mahathir tomorrow.

He said it is not polite to make such remarks because "we are coming as guests" in reference to Gore.

Instead of talking about mutual opportunities among Apec economies, Gore took a chance to lambast the host, he said.

"He has only been here for a few hours and he speaks as though he knows

a lot," he added.

The Russian businessmen said Gore should at least take some time to know what is really happening. Gore, who is standing in for Clinton for the Apec leaders' meeting here tomorrow, also left the diners dissappointed when he did not stay for dinner after delivering his speech.

--BERNAMA

ES SHY