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Gore strengthened Dr M's position as PM

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AL GORE is confused. So are a lot of other people. The confusion arises from the same name for reformasi movements in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Reformasi is an Indonesian word borrowed from the English word "reform". When borrowing a word from English the Indonesians add "si" to it. Thus, delegasi-delegasi di konfronsi telah membuat resolusi (The delegates at the conference passed a resolution). We would have said: Para perwakilan di persidangan telah membuat ketetapan.

Reform means to improve, as by alteration, correction of error, or abolition of abuses or malpractices. The late Tun Abdul Razak never liked the word reform.

He preferred restructuring. From the current state of affairs in Indonesia, the Indonesians most probably need reform or reformasi.

During the 20th Century, the Indonesians have had a violent history. In 1945 it made a unilateral declaration of independence.

After World War II ended, the Dutch returned to regain its lost territories of Dutch East Indies which it had lost to the Japanese.

The Indonesians fought bloody battles against the Dutch to retain their independence until the Dutch finally granted them independence in 1949.

Independent Indonesia did not have in place an administrative apparatus to govern the country after the departure of the Dutch.

So it had to rely on the freedom fighters which had any sort of organisation to do the job. As a result two thirds of the present day military forces are actually involved in the day to day administration of the country from the centre right down to village level.

After the traumatic experience of an attempted Communist take-over of the country in 1965, President Suharto needed to rule the country with a strong hand to achieve political stability and economic development but he sustained it for too long - a total of 32 years.

It was only to be a matter of time when suppressed political freedoms would erupt into violence.

The economic downturn since July last year was followed by massive retrenchments, soaring consumer prices and rampant corruption finally led to street demonstrations and violence forcing President Suharto to resign in May this year.

Violent street demonstrations continue to this day demanding all manner of reform including that the military should return to their barracks so that the country would be solely governed by civilians and politicians.

Malaya attained self-government in 1955 through negotiations with the British followed by further negotiations leading to independence in 1957.

The British had built-up a career civil service and legal system manned by Malaysians to ensure a smooth and peaceful transfer of power.

Malaya, and later Malaysia, has never been under a military government since independence, unlike Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia.

We have had regular free and fair elections every five years or less. We have changed from an agricultural economy to industrialised nation.

Our laws are enacted by Parliament. Even the Constitution has been amended 40 times to accord with changing times.

Political parties can be formed without limit as to number and are free to participate in elections.

We value our independence. That is why the late Tunku Abdul Rahman refused to join the South East Asia Treaty Organisation even though the US

offered to build for free the East-West Highway because he did not want the Americans to replace the British with their presence in the country.

When Malaysia was formed in 1963, President Sukarno was annoyed. He had reserved the name 'Malaysia' for his grand design of a Greater Nation of the Malays to include Indonesia, Malaya, Borneo and the Philippines.

He launched a military attack against Malaysia in 1964 which he called 'Konfrantasi'.

The people rallied behind the Government against this external attack to extinguish it and for added emphasis voted in the Alliance Party with a landslide victory in the 1964 general election.

Umno did not perform as expected in the 1959 and 1969 general elections. Following the observation of Tunku Abdul Rahman, no general election has been held since then in the year ending with '9'. It follows that the present Government will complete its full term to the year 2000.

In the meantime, reformasi supporters should consider forming a political party, preferably with a Malaysian name.

Last week, Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said that the people should be given the opportunity to express their views.

The solution is to issue them with police permits to hold political rallies in enclosed premises like stadiums and public halls so that they do not have to take to the streets.

Gore was confused about reformasi. He was not however, confused when he delivered the US signal that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad should step down.

His dinner speech during the Apec summit was clearly an interference with our domestic affairs to which all right thinking Malaysians have taken umbrage.

Thanks to Gore, he has strengthened Dr Mahathir's position as Prime Minister!

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