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People who side-step democratic process

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MUCH had been said about the reaction to US Vice-President Al Gore's declaration of support for the reformasi demonstrators.

The silent majority has spoken. The average rakyat too. The Americans and other foreigners have also had their say.

Most thought he was rude. Others accused him of meddling. But the majority saw it as an example of American arrogance and ignorance.

There were a few, of course, who thought that Gore was brave and his endorsement had given the reformasi demonstrators a huge moral boost.

These are people who worship America and its so-called democracy and sense of morality. They are a mixture of inadequately informed people, the pseudo-liberals and those who do not mind outside interference for as long as their cause is served.

There is a stark similarity between the thinking of this last group of people and those who signed the Pangkor Treaty that gave away the country to the British over 200 years ago.

But only days after Gore had spoken openly of his approval of the Malaysian demonstrators, their counterparts who had been on the Jakarta streets since 1994 went berserk.

In a weekend of killing, burning and looting, 13 people died and several churches and a nightclub were torched and looted.

The Jakarta violence showed the thin line separating the so-called peaceful demonstration and anarchy, and between demands for change and settling communal scores.

The weekend violence in Jakarta pitted the Javanese Muslim majority against the Ambonese Christian minority. It was an ethnic flare-up that took on religious dimensions.

This was what Gore's "brave people" were capable of doing. Yet when the Kent State University students protested against the Vietnam War in the early seventies, US state troopers shot them down.

It does not really matter whether the Jakarta mob that went on an orgy of violence was part of the reformasi demonstrators or not.

What matters is the fact that by accepting street violence as a means of solving problems, society is side-stepping the democratic process and the power of reason.

Malaysians fighting for whatever cause should have originality of thought. Aping Indonesia's reformasi indicates both a lack of ideas as well as a misunderstanding of the differences between our political system and that of Indonesia.

If Gore spoke of the demonstrators as the "brave people of Malaysia", what do we then make of the policemen, the majority of whom are Malays, who have their weekly face-off with the protestors?

And what are we to think of the old soldiers and policemen who for 40 over years, fought and died in order to defend the country from the armed communists?

They might not be the same policemen who face Gore's "brave Malaysians" on the streets of Kuala Lumpur.

But they were men from the same force who gave their lives to bring peace, law and order to the country so that the demonstrators can have good education and steady jobs.

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THOSE looking towards America for guidance, inspiration and assistance

must first understand that country, in particular its administration.

America is not Hollywood which occasionally dishes out fantasies and the US President is not always the benevolent sheriff.

As pointed out by writer David E. Sanger in the New York Times newspaper, Washington has always kept an unwritten list of foreign leaders who it thinks can make an enormous contribution to peace and security or to its agenda by staying on or going on early retirement.

These include dictators, unfriendly authoritarians and consistently annoying allies.

In the 1950s, said Sanger, the leftist leaders of Iran and Guatemala made the "Top 10". In the '60s it was populated by South Vietnam's Diem and Indonesia's Sukarno.

President Nixon and his advisers infamously agreed at a secret meeting in the '70s that the best way to deal with the government of Salvador Allende Gossens in Chile was to "make the economy scream".

As most of us know, the US went on to engineer a military coup against the democratically elected socialist-minded leader and replaced him with Gen Pinochet.

Two weeks ago, noted Sanger, driven by frustration, or anxiety, or perhaps the lure of sounding tough for the cameras, the Clinton Administration piped up twice in very different situations and in opposite corners of the world.

Two Sundays ago, hours after he called off an attack on Iraq, Clinton finally volunteered the obvious - that the focus of US policy toward Iraq is the removal of President Saddam Hussein.

He called it supporting the "forces of change in Iraq" no matter that covert efforts to do just that have failed miserably.

The bigger surprise, said Sanger, was when Al Gore used his visit to Malaysia for an Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation summit to throw American support behind protestors calling for reformasi, the code word (borrowed from Indonesia) for dumping Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Noting that Dr Mahathir is no Saddam Hussein, not by a long shot, Sanger said he has long been a burr in Washington's side, denouncing the US and its currency traders.

While Dr Mahathir is not liked by some leaders of the US Administration for what is seen as his anti-West stance, Japanese political scientist Eiichi Furukawa said his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is loved by the Americans.

Writing in the New Straits Times, the Director of the Japan Centre for International Studies, said the West does not like Dr Mahathir's outspoken criticisms and tries very hard to find his shortcomings and misdeeds.

On the other hand, he said, the former Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister talked about the West favourably and the western media, therefore, promoted him.

Furukawa noted that Anwar's revolt against Dr Mahathir was seen by the West as a big opportunity to propagate biased interpretations of Malaysian politics almost as a vengeance.

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THE pledge of support on Tuesday by the Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia for the Government's measures in maintaining political stability and bringing about economic recovery could not have come at a more crucial time.

It also expressed support for the Government in defending the dignity and sovereignty of the country and pledged its commitment to uphold the rule of law and the Constitution.

The significance of the pledges is best seen in the context of the role

of the Chinese community in the present political and economic situation affecting the country.

While it is understandable that the Chinese community is reluctant to adopt a stand or make its feeling known regarding the present political situation, it cannot forever stand on the sideline.

What has been happening since September affects not just Umno and the Malays. It has immediate and long-term implications for all Malaysians.

The decision of the federation to reject any form of foreign interference in the country's internal affairs is a strong and bold statement.

It reflects the confidence of the Chinese community in the country's political system and in the ability of the Government to ensure the general safety and security of the people, regardless of their ethnicity and religious beliefs.

The pledges are part of an eight-point memorandum presented by FCAM when its delegation called on the Prime Minister at his office.

The delegation comprised of representatives of 13 State Chinese Assembly Halls led by FCAM president Datuk Chong Chin Shoong. The 13 halls have more than 2,000 Chinese guilds and associations with over 100,000 individual members.

Like the majority of the Malays, the Malaysian Chinese are fully aware of the importance of maintaining political stability amidst the regional economic and political crises.

Without political stability, it is difficult for us to revive the economy and rekindle investors' confidence.

As has been proven yet and again in this country and elsewhere, political instability and a weak economy can precipitate the breakdown of law and order.

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THE hint by the Kelantan Umno deputy liaison committee chairman, Datuk Annuar Musa, that the party may field fresh candidates in the State in the coming general election is most encouraging.

While it cannot be denied that having experienced representatives in Parliament and State legislative assemblies is an asset to the party and the people, Umno must continue to evolve and regenerate.

It is therefore not a bad idea for the party to nominate a certain number of young and promising leaders to contest in each general election.

There should, perhaps, be a limit to the length of time a representative can serve, say, up to two terms unless he or she performs exceptionally well.

This is understandably more urgent in the case of Kelantan Umno where the party is facing an uphill challenge.

With more young and educated people likely to join the rank of voters in the coming general election, the rejuvenation process must be made transparent. This should include not only the choice of younger candidates but also the adoption of appropriate policies and programmes.

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