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Protesters' action merely manifests slave mentality

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FREEDOM in a democratic polity is of many things taken for granted and for some it seems there's never enough. Great then is the temptation to do more in the name of freedom on someone else's turf.

An incident which occurred in the United Nations General Assembly in 1962 provides an illustration. While British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was delivering his speech Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev who was present suddenly took off one of his shoes and banged it loudly on his table. Macmillan gave a toothy smile - or was it a smirk? - which made Khrushchev more furious and he banged his shoe repeatedly while shouting Russian swear words.

The story goes that when Macmillan returned to Waldoft-Astoria hotel later Americans present in the lobby and at the bar clapped and cheered.

Time marches on, as the old Time magazine newsreels used to intone, and we come to November 1998. US Vice-President Al Gore came to attend a dinner hosted by Malaysia for Apec leaders and delegates.

Gore was given the signal honour to deliver an address. In the words of an American newspaper, The Honolulu Advertiser (Nov 19), he "went too far, virtually egging on crowds demonstrating in the streets of Kuala Lumpur against Dr Mahathir".

Having done that Gore suddenly left the banquet hall leaving 20 other heads of states and governments nonplussed.

The American newspaper's commentary on the incident was titled "Can Clinton repair Gore's Malaysia miscue?"

As the Khrushchev melodrama in the UN was recorded so would Gore's foot in the mouth speech and behaviour be in Apec's annals.

We go back a bit further in history. More crude was Gen Curtis LeMay, appointed Commander of the US Strategic Air Command following his success in planning saturation bombings on Germany during World War II and low-level bombings of Tokyo and other Japanese cities which razed entire areas and killed thousands.

At the time when the war in Vietnam wasn't going well he proposed that North Vietnam be "bombed to stoneage".

He was later, the vice-presidential candidate of a third political party in the US headed by anti-Negro George Wallace. He lost.

As is acknowledged in politics wherever they may be there must be freedom. Reported just the other day was the victory of Quebec separatists in the French-speaking Canadian province. It could be the next step in another referendum in Quebec's goal of secession from the rest of Canada.

No political leader in Malaysia has ever made any comments on the touchy political situation despite statements by Canadian officials before the Apec summit that their august Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, would not meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on a one-to-one basis. There were also comments about Malaysian affairs by Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy.

Helping to explain things is a letter e-mailed from Canada and published in another Malaysian newspaper. It reads:

"I have been following with interest the situation in your country as it involves the trial and your Prime Minister's comment about speculators. I have also been listening to our Prime Minister (Jean) Chretien's remarks and those of of US Vice-President Al Gore.

"I and most Canadians are appalled at the willingness of Chretien to

pander to the US interests in this and other matters, such as Iraq.

"Many Canadians also ask why Chretien, who ordered the Mounted Police to spray pepper in the faces of disciplined stationary students at the last Apec summit, has this desire to meddle in your internal affairs. He should have been asked to leave the country.

"Sometime ago Charles de Gaulle gave a speech in Chretien's home province where he urged Quebec's people to vote for separation. The Canadian Liberal Government of which Chretien is the current leader ordered his trip cut short and ordered de Gaulle out of the country.

"Apparently Chretien has double standards, one for Canada and another for Malaysia.

"This Canadian wishes to apologise for the crude statements of our Prime Minister to the Malaysian people. Signed D.L. Edgcumbe, Canada".

A visitor to Malaysia from the planet Mars, Edmonton or Gore's hometown is free to read whatever he fancies. He can read the International Herald Tribune, often critical of Malaysia.

It is, incidently printed by Utusan Melayu (M) Bhd. Or he might want to read the often critical Asian Wall Street Journal. It is printed by Papyrus Printing Sendirian Bhd, owned by the Star newspaper group.

If the visitor knows Malay he might wish to read the bi-weekly Harakah, official organ of Pas, the Opposition party in control of Kelantan.

The paper's circulation is said to have soared from 60,000 to 300,000 copies and in almost every issue are news items about Umno members said to have joined Pas in droves.

The visitor can thereafter read the Aliran monthly. The titles on its cover explain things: February issue - The economy, rebuild, remake, rethink (repent?); March issue - The NEAC, Looking after whose interests?; July issue - The Umno General Assembly. Criticisms and revelations. In short, every issue is a litany of woes.

The visitor is, therefore, forgiven if after having read all those publications, watch CNN, CNBC or the BBC and then read the foreign magazines he then comes to the conclusion that Malaysia is in a mess and that nothing works!

Only after he moves around the capital city, the crowded shopping malls and Globe Silk Store included, or criss-cross the country would he see the real picture of things.

That he can read just about anything that says bad things about Malaysia and not read at all Malaysian newspapers is testimony to our confidence in ourselves and our country.

Published in the Sun in early November was a picture of Malaysian lawyer S. Sivarama from Suaram, a non-governmental organisation, leading some foreign representatives to the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's first day of trial. That too is freedom.

That the foreigners, however, wanted special observer status was something else. They must queue with members of the Malaysian public.

That they represent Amnesty International, the International Commission of Justice, The Indonesian Legal Aid Bureau do not make them more special than the ordinary Malaysian.

Reported in this newspaper on Nov 27 was a report about a delegation handing to the police a memorandum about Gagasan Demokrasi Rakyat chairman, Tian Chua, being detained at a demonstration in Kuala Lumpur.

Among the delegation members were S. Arutchelvan from Suaram and Dr Sanusi Osman, Party Rakyat secretary-general. There was then a 90-minute dialogue with the police.

Was there, by the way, such a dialogue between the blacks and the Los Angeles Police Department during the Rodney King trial?

Gore, Chretien and Axworthy should not think that the few demonstrators

who carried placards "Clinton tangkap Mahathir" and "Malaysians support Gore and Albright" represent Malaysians. They merely demean themselves by their manifestation of slave mentality and wanting to be re-colonised by Mat Salleh masters.

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