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Singapore-Gore
SINGAPOREANS HIT BACK OVER GORE AFFAIR

SINGAPORE, Nov 21 (Bernama) -- A letter written by an American supporting Vice-President Al Gore's criticism of Malaysia and deriding Singapore at the same time has drawn a barrage of vehement criticisms from several other readers of the Straits Times newspaper here today.

They struck out at one Elaine Supkis of New York who said she was not surprised that Singapore was cautioning Gore to criticise Malaysia quietly because "Singapore has no real civil liberties just like Malaysia".

In her letter carried by the newspaper two days ago, Supkis said there was more to life than order in the streets and claimed that Singapore was just as anxious to squelch any dissidence and "can get just as nasty as Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad if challenged".

Gore has drawn a lot of flak from within and outside Malaysia for openly voicing his support for the so-called movement for reform of supporters of sacked deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who had been taking to the streets to demonstrate.

Expressing support for order in the streets any day, reader Chua Sheng Yang said Gore's lack of respect was typical of the American attitude towards most Asian countries.

"Time and again, Americans have made scathing criticisms of the way we Asians have chosen to structure our politics simply because of the fact that we deviate from what they deem to be the 'superior' American system.

"And I am sure that we Singaporeans will 'get nasty' as Ms Supkis put it, when our sovereignty and dignity are questioned and 'challenged' by people who do not understand the differences between our cultures and instead choose to make sweeping remarks based on a myopic and prejudiced, if not bigoted, viewpoint," said Chua.

"If a high standard of living, a stable government and a multiracial society in which ethnic conflicts and racism do not exist are the price to pay for our not being a 'real democracy with real freedom of speech', then so be it," Chua added.

Chua pointed out that freedom of speech was a privilege and not be to abused, citing the Monica Lewinsky affair which was turned into a circus by the free media in the US, not so much to provide the public with information but rather to scandalise to boost ratings.

Another reader, Annette Kho Guan Hoon, said Supkis' perception of civil liberties were presumably measured by the American yardstick and it would be myopic to assume that every one living elsewhere would pine for such democracy.

"If the general populace is happy with the government, elected out of the people's own free will, who is to suggest that 'real' civil rights are lacking?" she asked.

Reader Chan Hon Chew posed this: "On the invitation of Mr Bill Clinton, Dr Mahathir Mohamad walks into the White House and gives a lecture on sexual morality, and hails as heroes all Americans calling for the impeachment of Mr Clinton. Wouldn't any self-respecting American feel outraged?"

Chan said to say that Singapore or Malaysia had no real civil liberties was a misguided notion and it was for each sovereign state to decide how much was acceptable without compromising law and order.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that Gore, who made his remarks during a business dinner in Kuala Lumpur, was

supporting terrorism and trying to incite riots by praising Anwar's supporters.

-- BERNAMA

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