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A Bush or Gore win makes no difference

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BY THE time this article appears, it will be clear then, between George W. Bush and Al Gore, who had managed to secure the US presidency, widely accepted as being the leader of the most powerful nation in the world.

Much as it is a domestic affairs of the Americans, no other election for the head of a state or government, is as intensely followed as that of the US, not only this year's but also in the past.

Such interest generated by the presidential election has a lot to do with the fact that, the winner becomes the leader of the most influential nation which in effect can shape the policies of other nations.

In addition, no one can actually ignore the election when all the international media, to be read as US dominated, keep the race as its top news item.

However, this year's US presidential election has a special place among Malaysians as compared with previous polls.

It is simply because Democrat's Al Gore had made a mark on the Malaysian psyche during his visit to Kuala Lumpur for the Apec summit in 1998.

It was then he decided to be rude when he expressed his support for the reformasi movement before his dinner hosts, the Malaysian government and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Since then, he had been described as jaguh reformasi (champion of reforms), not in the context of pursuing changes but within the confines of the Malaysian opposition struggle.

Though a couple of years had passed since the episode, Gore's remarks remained to haunt Malaysians.

For supporters of reformasi, generally leaning towards the Parti Keadilan Nasional, Gore's victory will be shared as they believed, in him, they have a sympathiser to their cause.

For those who supports the establishment, a victory for Bush will somewhat neutralise this.

The matter is further justified by Dr Mahathir's remarks that bilateral relations between Malaysia and the US may be somewhat difficult if Gore made it to the presidency.

No doubt, whoever won would not have made any difference to Malaysia as no one can be really sure whether Bush will not emulate what Gore had done, that is to poke his nose into the affairs of another sovereign nation.

As such, detractors of Keadilan and the Malaysian reformasi movement should not be overly jubilant or choose to share a Bush victory.

Apart from that, no doubt they have a right to derive some satisfaction if Gore lost the race and be able to say "it serves him right", if not because of his meddling nature, at least for the arrogance he showed while in Malaysia.

The only aspect the nation can look forward to in a Bush victory is that bilateral relations between the present Malaysian government and that of the US can now start on a "clean slate" without any hangups or paranoia.

It would definitely be quite difficult for the present government to deal with Gore if he won as it would have put the Malaysian government in a difficult spot as the Malaysian Government is definitely already uncomfortable with him.

Beyond that, the outcome of the US presidential election has no direct bearing on Malaysia and Malaysians as a whole.

If, Malaysians, regardless of which side of the political divide, expect immediate changes in terms of the US foreign policies in the case of a Bush victory, it may be wishful thinking.

Again, if they expect there will be no more resolutions like the one that came from the seven Congressmen which wanted a re-trial of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, they should think again.

In other words, nothing much will change with Bush at the helm and Malaysians can expect the US to be like what it is today albeit some minor changes in its domestic policies.

With the US presidential election settled, the next focus for Malaysians would be the political development in neighbouring Philippines where President Joseph Estrada is struggling to remain in office.

Estrada, like Gore, managed to grab the interest of Malaysians when he too had, during the height of the Malaysian political and economic crisis, shown support to Anwar and the reformasi movement.

Quite a number of Malaysians who opposed the reformasi are also eager to see Estrada fall from grace and the fact that he is embroiled in a scandal of his own, had been "sweet news" to them.

However, much as these Malaysians want to see Estrada fall from grace, there is no promise that his successor, at this stage, look set to be Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, is going to be a leader that will not "interfere" in the Malaysian affairs.

In other words, the fall of Estrada will only provide, yet another sense of satisfaction among those who were upset with him for trying to poke his nose in Malaysia's domestic matters.

From there on, the bilateral ties between Malaysia and other nations, the US, Philippines or any others, depend very much on the perceptions each have of the other.

That aside, given the way the world has evolved, it is actually quite difficult to expect nations from not "interfering" in the affairs of another, Malaysia included.

The only thing expected from citizens of smaller nations like Malaysia of others, especially the powerful nation like US is not to impose their values and the practice of double-standards.

After all, time and time again, it has been proven that any interest the US have in other nations has always been in matters which serves its economic and military might.

No doubt, the US will always beat around the bush when it comes to their real intentions and veils them under the "auspices" of human rights, justice and democratic principles.

On that score, a Gore or Bush in hand makes no difference to Malaysia.

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