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Guarding our sovereignty

AS pointed out by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the allegation that Malaysia does not practise democracy and violates the rights of its people is made by those who want to weaken the Government and tarnish the country.

But there is more to it. We would like to add that the accusations stem from an on-going ideological war between East Asia and a mighty few in the West, led by none other than Uncle Sam. These so-called champions of democracy and human rights show a low threshold for any political development that departs from the Anglo-American model.

Such a bigoted view ignores the fact that the global democratisation process - already in its third wave according to Samuel Huntington - does not necessarily yield similar end-products in countries that are endowed with vastly different political heritage, culture and history.

They discount the fact that there are many types of democracy such as constitutional democracy, populist democracy, liberal democracy, democratic centralism and guided democracy. It is noted that the centrepiece of US foreign policy is the export of liberal democracy, be it by guns, wilful agitation of the opposition and political interference. As seen in the case of Iraq and Cuba, the US relentlessly pursues this to the point of ignoring the sovereignty of the nation.

This begs the question: Must all democracies be a version of Anglo-American democracy? Anglo-American democracy is not utopia and the countries practising it are guilty of the same violations they accuse Malaysia. What is abhorrent is that in their selective chastisement of developing nations, they are blind to their sins.

Until the 50s, 10 per cent of the black population in the US did not have the vote and until now, racism persists. Its unprecedented economic prosperity does not endow its government with the resolve to bridge the rich-poor divide. Its blind adherence to liberalism explains why its government is loathed to take an interventionist measure to eradicate poverty. Until 1971, Swiss women did not have the vote. Closer home, the international media criticises Umno to the hilt but strangely, none mention Pas' undemocratic practice of not fielding women as political candidates. None of these were condemned as undemocratic or violation of human rights.

Again, it is odd that Huntington, who had served in Clinton's foreign policy advisory committee on Asia-Pacific, deigned that "only two countries in East Asia, Japan and Philippines, have had a sustained experience with democratic government and in both counts, democracy was the product of American presence". But we know these two kowtow to the US' demands. It seems that without some elements of American influence and input, no country's political process and institutions can be said to be democratic.

In truth, Washington's obsession with its role as a democratic watchdog is no more than a covert way of "colonising" developing countries. Any country which refuses its political tutelage, as in the case of Malaysia, and does not have symmetric thinking with it are condemned as undemocratic. Alas, many sovereign nations are 'made-in-USA'. Unless the US stops abusing 'democracy' as a vehicle for imperialism and accepts variants in democracy such as Asian democracy, its moves will sour its relations with friends.

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