

# US-Malaysia relations move on after Al Gore

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## On Politics

By **ABDULLAH AHMAD**

We now look forward to building our relations on the basis of two equal and sovereign nations

FOR most of Malaysia's 44 years of independence, bilateral relations between Malaysia and the US have been strong in trade, investment, defence, people-to-people, and even on the political front.

An unwelcome lacuna occurred only during the Clinton Administration through inept meddling in our domestic politics by the colourless Vice-President Al Gore who, while he was Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's guest, called on Malaysians to take to the streets against his host in November 1998.

We had tolerated various statements questioning our governance but Al Gore's diplomatic *faux pas*, political gaffe and bad manners were the last straw.

I wrote various columns criticising Al Gore. I wished and predicted he would lose to George W. Bush and he did.

All that is behind us now. We now look forward to building our relations on the basis of two equal and sovereign nations even though we are of unequal wealth, power and influence.

What I heard of the meeting between Dr Mahathir and President Bush in Shanghai is very encouraging. We have entered into a period of mutual respect, accommodation and co-operation.

Bush, responding to Dr Mahathir's parting wish, gave a clear indication that the relations between KL and Washington are clearly not only on the mend! but also to be enhanced.

Though the President did not say as much, he appeared to have indicated that relations could only be better now that the *bete noire* of Malaysians is no longer around.

itant communist terrorism.

We reiterate we will be united against terror, help reverse the economic malaise, but beg to differ over US assaults on Afghanistan.

Unlike China and the US, which are both strategic partners and strategic competitors, we have only an element of co-operation in our relationship with the lone superpower.

There are, of course, nations that acknowledge we are a moderate Muslim nation held in high esteem by them. This will not lead to conflicts of interest with the US; it may perhaps complement and even strengthen the American effort in building the coalition against terrorism that it has been assembling since September 11.

Malaysia desires good relations with all nations more so with the US because it is our largest trading partner. Though we are small, we are the US' 12th largest customer in terms of imports.

American investments here are big and we welcome new and larger investment, trade and exchange of person-to-person visits via tourism and education.

I am glad at this apparent shift in US policy: it no longer wants to cling to old patterns of interference in our domestic politics. And we, in turn, cooperate and even support American initiatives to encourage trade, investment and in maintaining a stable and prosperous world order.

The Shanghai Asia Pacific Economic Conference meeting of 21 nations (minus Taiwan which boycotted the conference) for the first time since its inception in 1989 was dominated by politics instead of the usual discussion on the economy, its future and possibilities.