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Australia must choose

AUSTRALIA says it wants to be Asian but in reality, it is so pro-America that its true intention can easily be called into question.

Well, it can't have it both ways, as stressed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. If it wants to be a part of Asia, which is geographically closer to it than America or Europe, then it must identify with Asian interests and aspirations. Asia, with its diverse cultural and religious traditions, can at least accommodate Australia's values and norms, even though these are essentially Western. But the same reciprocity cannot be expected of Australia, given its cultural arrogance and US-influenced human rights agenda.

Australia only wants to be Asian to participate and benefit from the economic progress of Asia. But it chooses to back the US to the hilt, even more so than the Europeans, when the Americans threaten to invade Iraq and are backing the Israelis, who are oppressing the Palestinians.

Many Asians, especially the Muslims, are unhappy with the US for their anti-Iraq and pro-Israeli policies. Australia will alienate many more Asians and Muslims if it persists in supporting the bullying and strong-arm tactics of the US in their campaign against Iraq and in the war against global terrorism. Its treatment of its own Muslims after the Bali attacks is dangerously approaching persecution.

The liberation of East Timor may be cited by Australia as a towering example of its fight for human rights, freedom and democracy. But many in Asia were not fooled by its pretense of altruism and its hypocrisy and self-serving agenda have just surfaced in its squabble with that tiny and impoverished country over gas fields in the Timor Sea. Australia is accused of forcing the East Timorese into accepting an unfair deal. There is little doubt of where it stands, when it shows so blatantly the direction in which it bows.