

Gore, Wolfowitz want US to weigh in on Anwar trial
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A former US vice-president and an ex-deputy defence secretary appealed today for their government to weigh in on the ongoing second sodomy trial of Anwar Ibrahim.

Describing it as a trial that threatens not just Anwar "but all those in Malaysia who have struggled for a freer and more democratic nation," they urged the Barack Obama administration to "make clear the importance the US attaches to the role of the law in sustaining a political process in which justice and freedom are natural allies".

"We know from experience that sensitive issues of this kind are often best pursued quietly, government to government. But time is running out. A moment of truth is approaching," said former vice-president Al Gore and former deputy defence secretary Paul Wolfowitz in a rare joint-opinion piece carried by the influential Wall Street Journal.

al gore 150808 01The duo are considered a political 'odd couple' - Gore (left) is a Nobel Peace Prize winner (joint award with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2007), while Wolfowitz is the architect of the Iraq War.

One is a Democrat and the other a Republican, but both crossed the divide in the American political spectrum to support Anwar, a mutual friend.

The Obama administration had previously been criticised for its silence over Anwar's trial given its stated policy of engaging with the Islamic world.

Gore and Wolfowitz said they disagree on many things between themselves as well as with Anwar, such as on foreign policy.

However they are both convinced that Anwar "is committed to the values of pluralism, tolerance and freedom that are needed for Malaysia to flourish", in addition to other positive qualities as a political leader, statesman and intellectual.

"These qualities include lucidity and openness to debate and engagement, commitment to principles of accountability and good governance, and a serious concern for the future of his country and the world - not to mention his extraordinary courage in standing up for what he believes."

'Odour of manipulation'

For these reasons, said Gore and Wolfowitz (right), the trial in which Anwar faces for the second time "trumped up" charges has implications for efforts towards social and political reform.

Like the first sodomy charge levelled against Anwar 10 years ago, the timing of the second trial - coming soon after the March 2008 general election in which the BN lost its two-thirds majority in Parliament - carries the "strong odour" of political manipulation, they said.

This time, they added, the allegations are even less credible and the violations of due process "even more egregious", they added.

"While Anwar Ibrahim is on trial before the state, the state is on trial before its people and the world."

NONEAt the same time, the trial is also important for the rest of the world, said Gore and Wolfowitz (right), "because it casts a troubling shadow over the future of a nation that should be a model for other Muslim countries".

Notwithstanding the keenness by which the outside world watches the Sodomy II trial and the Malaysian government's treatment of Anwar, what matters is "not our opinion of Mr Anwar's character" but that of other Malaysians, said Gore and Wolfowitz.

"Malaysians should decide for themselves, through an open electoral process, who they wish to lead them. They should not be deprived of that opportunity by an abuse of judicial power."

'Gov't damaging its credibility'

Turning to the Malaysian government, they said the opportunity accorded by the current postponement of the trial provides an opportunity for the government to "do the right thing".

NONEThis would not only benefit Anwar, said Gore and Wolfowitz, but "the millions of Malaysian citizens who look to him as a spokesman for their aspirations".

"We urge those in the Malaysian government who will decide this matter to act with wisdom."

Gore, who similarly backed Anwar publicly during the 1998 charges, said in 2008 that the Malaysian government was damaging its own credibility at home and abroad by using the same tactic to charge the former deputy premier.

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