

# PM: British press did not bother to check

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KUALA LUMPUR: The British press did not even bother to check whether there was an aluminium smelter project being undertaken in Malaysia when it accused Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of accepting a bribe from a company (Whimpey International) bidding for it.

The Prime Minister said last night the project was non-existent but that did not prevent the British press from telling lies about him.

He was referring to a report in *The Sunday Times* alleging that a representative from Whimpey International gave him US\$50,000 to secure a contract for the aluminium smelter project.

"If this Whimpey confessed to bribing me, I think he should be arrested for bribing people and charged for bribery if he can prove I have accepted a bribe he can charge me also," he told reporters after breaking fast at Carcosa Sri Negara with

Bakti members and handicapped children.

Turning to a reporter from Rupert Murdoch's Star TV, he said: "I hope you will publish this, please report the truth of what I said, don't cut to pieces all these statements. When you black me out and censor what I say, that is controlling. The press is under your control ... so please don't behave like some of the countries which are accused of controlling the press."

He said the British Government had never given Malaysia a £240 million grant as reported in the British press but the money was a loan which has to be repaid.

Asked by the Star TV reporter what he wanted the British media to do, he replied: "Tell the truth. Is that so hard to do? If it is a loan, say it is a loan, not a grant. There is a world of difference between a loan and a grant."

"For example, when we were negotiating to buy arms we were also negotiating to do a lot of other

things. Are we supposed to stop negotiating for other things because we are trying to buy arms?"

"If the British had told us while we were negotiating to buy arms we should not do anything at all, okay then we probably won't buy the arms and we can go for other things ... and we can buy from other people."

Dr Mahathir again stressed that the Government had nothing against the British Government, business community or people.

"But what we can't stand is the kind of lies that are being spread by the British press."

Asked about Major's comment on BBC radio that Malaysia's action in banning British firms from government contracts was short-sighted and unjustified he said: "He is entitled to his opinion."

"I don't know ... I'll have to find out first whether that was what he said or merely what was reported in the British press."