

Umno panel backs ban on contracts

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the party's supreme council has endorsed the decision not to award new Government contracts to British companies.

The decision was taken at a 2½-hour meeting, which he chaired today.

Dr Mahathir added that he had not asked for an apology from *The Sunday Times* for publishing lies about him but added that "they should stick to the truth".

He said lies would only create a lot of problems for other people.

"We are asking them to stick to the truth, that is all. Nothing much. When I don't receive bribes, please don't say I received it.

"Some crank can come out and say I received US\$50,000 (RM136,500)... well, I mean I'm not that cheap in the first place," he said in jest at the news conference held after the meeting.

He reiterated that there was no project to build an aluminium smelter by the Government and yet this re-

port had been published all over the world.

"At the last count, we found that 13 different countries had printed this report about my being corrupt... and how do I get rid of that kind of reputation?" Dr Mahathir said in response to questions on the issue from reporters, including British media representatives.

The Prime Minister also declined to comment further on British Prime Minister John Major's remarks that the Government's decision not to offer new contracts to British firms was "short-sighted" and would damage Malaysian interests as much as that of the British.

Dr Mahathir said he had not said anything against Major and had no quarrel with the British Government.

"While we do not expect Major to clamp down on the British Press, we do not know whether anybody should support lies by the Press.

"We did not get any grant from the British for the Pergau project. All we got was a loan. Then say it is a loan. Any Government that gives a grant to cover half the cost of the project must be stupid indeed. I don't think the British Government is stupid." Asked whether there was a

link between the loan for the project and the arms deal, Dr Mahathir said that there was none.

He said the negotiation was held at the same time, but this should not stop negotiations to buy arms.

"If the British Government insists that while we are buying arms from them we should not give any contracts to them, that is fine with us. We will give the contracts to other people."

Dr Mahathir stressed that he did not expect any damage to be caused from the decision not to award British companies with future Government contracts.

When asked whether it would help improve relations if the British Government or Major was more forthright, he said, the British Government knew the truth about the Pergau project and this should be explained to the newspapers because obviously the media was coming out with incorrect reports.

When asked by a foreign reporter whether he thought the British Government was weak, Dr Mahathir replied.

"I don't want to comment about the British Government. If the people of Britain want to get rid of their Government, they should do so on their own ... they

should not seek my help.

"It seems to me that the British Press is very keen to get rid of their Government. But don't ask me for help. I am not interested. As far as I am concerned, we do not have any quarrel with British people. Our quarrel is with the Press for printing rubbish," he said.

When asked if the British Government or Major should be more forthright in explaining the issue, Dr Mahathir said: "I think the British Government is in possession of the truth about the Pergau project ... how much money they gave ... whether in the form of loan or grant.

"This should be explained to the papers because obviously papers were coming out with incorrect reports. The British Government should have said that it was not a grant but a loan."

When asked how Malaysia's dissatisfaction with the British would continue, he said, if the British Press continued to tell lies, "we will continue for that length of time".

When a reporter suggested that he should be willing to accept criticism, Dr Mahathir said, he accepted criticisms against him but could not accept lies printed about him since he had no means of redress.