

Better ties with US now

By WONG CHUN WAI *Overseas*

WASHINGTON: The stage is set for relations between the United States and Malaysia — which have been patchy over the past few years — to turn for the better.

Emerging from a successful meeting with President Bill Clinton yesterday, **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** told newsmen: "As a result of this meeting, relations between Malaysia and the United States will be much easier.

"It has been a useful discussion on many issues. We agreed on most things."

The two leaders appeared to hit it off, meeting for about 80 minutes which was way past the scheduled time for the informal talks.

Clinton praised Dr Mahathir, saying he admired the Prime Minister's leadership and accomplishments.

The US President said he looked forward to establishing "a good relationship with him and to continue our partnership."

The meeting between Clinton and Dr Mahathir has been regarded as significant because under the (George) Bush administration, Malaysia and the US appeared to have differing views on many issues.

Besides US opposition to the East Asia Economic Caucus, then Secretary of State James Baker had issued veiled threats to South Korea and Japan against joining the caucus.

Last year, Dr Mahathir snubbed the US by refusing to attend the inaugural Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) summit in Seattle.

Since then, officials from both countries had worked hard for Clinton and Dr Mahathir to meet.

Yesterday, Clinton and Dr Mahathir exchanged views on a wide range of issues from the EAEC to the worsening

situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the need for reforms in the United Nations.

The two leaders broke into a 10-minute private meeting after an earlier segment which included officials.

Dr Mahathir was accompanied by adviser Tun Daim Zainuddin, Malaysia's permanent representative to the UN Tan Sri Razali Ismail and ambassador Datuk Abdul Mohamed Majid.

With Clinton were Vice-President Al Gore, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, National Security Council adviser Anthony Lake and US Ambassador to Malaysia John Wolf.

Dr Mahathir invited Clinton to visit Kuala Lumpur en route to Jakarta to attend the Apec meeting in November.

"I hope he will make it. He said yes

but that doesn't mean he will come. At least he didn't say no."

Dr Mahathir said they discussed at length the problems in Bosnia where Muslims had been denied the right to arm themselves to resist aggression by the Serbs.

"I think there is not much difference in our views but there is this problem of our countries to act," he added.

Asked whether there were signs Clinton would now favour stronger action, Dr Mahathir replied: "I can't say I have any indication of that at the moment but I am glad he listened to my views."

The two leaders discussed the question of human rights and the US threat to re-

● TURN TO PAGE 2

Mahathir and Clinton agree on most issues

● FROM PAGE ONE

voke the most-favoured trading nation status from China, which will lead to increased tariffs.

"I think one should not apply pressure. One should try to convince by pointing out right and wrong, rather than by anything that might be interpreted as arm-twisting... this should be applied not just to China but any country," said Dr Mahathir.

On attempts to link trade with labour standards, he told Clinton that while "we appreciate the concern for the workers in developing countries," it could also result in workers not getting any jobs if wages kept increasing.

On the EAEC, Dr Mahathir said he explained the subject to Clinton.

"I don't expect a yes or a no now, but I merely explained," he said when asked whether they talked about the caucus.

Asked whether he brought up the domination of Apec by the US, Dr Mahathir replied: "Yes, I did. He didn't say he disagreed with me. On most things, he said he agreed with me and I suppose it includes all these things."

Razali said the outcome of the Clinton-Mahathir meeting was satisfactory and that "it is not one of those superficial meetings."

He added: "It was noticeable that Clinton took a lot of trouble to explain to the PM the various aspects of his policies."

Razali said Clinton sought Dr Mahathir's advice on a number of issues, particularly those related to Asia.

Clinton, he said, stressed that the US was trying to establish a credible partnership in Asia.

However, Dr Mahathir cautioned that the line must be drawn between criticism and arm-twisting as was the tendency now.

The Prime Minister said the region had a culturally developed society and it was resilient, adding that the natural forces must be allowed to evolve to meet the objectives, particularly on the issues of human rights and democracy.

On Bosnia, Razali said Clinton shared Malaysia's views that it was unfair to impose the arms embargo on the Bosnians.

He said Clinton gave an assurance that the US would push for the embargo to be lifted but expected resistance from Nato countries and Russia.

Razali said Clinton also feared that if the US applied unilateral action on the Serbs, Nato countries would pull out from the UN peace-keeping force.