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Mahathir, Blair hold talks on bilateral issues

Hardev Kaur in London

LONDON, Tues: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad met the new British Prime Minister Tony Blair at No. 10 Downing Street today. Dr Mahathir is the first Asian leader to meet Blair since the latter took office following the Labour Party's election victory on May 1.

This is the second meeting between the two - they first met in May last year when Blair was the Opposition leader. The 43-year old leader of the Labour Party took over as the British Prime Minister from Mr John Major whose Conservative Party lost the election after ruling the country for 18 years.

Dr Mahathir said after the half-hour meeting that they discussed matters of bilateral interest, the situation in South-East Asia and East Asia as well as economic issues.

The discussions were quite general, nothing specific, he said. Blair gave an undertaking to continue to work to improve bilateral relations.

Dr Mahathir is on the second day of his five-day visit to Britain to promote the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). Earlier in the day, he addressed some 1,000 business leaders and entrepreneurs from around the world and gave them an insight into what they can expect from the MSC.

Following his speech, the Prime Minister fielded several questions from the floor, ranging from what the London School of Economics can contribute; Malaysia's efforts in environmental protection; to the possible links with Hong Kong and other business centres; and, how the MSC will benefit and derive benefits from the surrounding areas.

The Prime Minister also responded to questions from participants in Cardiff, Wales, via a live video link-up.

To a television journalist who said "there are some worries about your health, can you assure everybody that you are indeed in good health," Dr Mahathir replied: "You are taking pictures of me, you can see ... (that I am in good health)", and he laughed.

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