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PM: We won't review relations with US despite Gore's remarks

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia would not review its relations with the United States of America despite Vice-President Al Gore's remarks which many Malaysians viewed as gross interference in the country's domestic affairs.

The Prime Minister was asked whether ties between the two countries had been affected by Gore's remarks at the Apec Business Summit dinner on Monday when the American leader had praised the reformasi movement, describing the protesters as the "brave people of Malaysia".

As far as Malaysia was concerned, there was no change in relations between the two countries, Dr Mahathir said at a Press conference at the close of the Apec Leaders summit at the Palace of the Golden Horses.

Asked whether he agreed that Gore was trying to make a point that for economies facing financial crisis to get out of the problem they would have to be more transparent and democratic, Dr Mahathir said:

"Well, I don't understand that part of his speech ... that speech has already been made and I don't need to say anything more," said Dr Mahathir, who was also asked whether Malaysia was considering taking action against the US similar to the "Buy British Last" policy in 1982 which saw Malaysia putting British goods and services last on its procurement list.

Dr Mahathir replied that there was no proposal "to buy anything last".

Asked whether he shared Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's statement that Malaysians would hold the United States accountable for any rupture of harmony arising from the "irresponsible incitement", Dr Mahathir said: "I stand by my Foreign Minister."

Dr Mahathir said that he did not discuss Malaysia's political situation with Gore.

Asked what he thought of Apec leaders including Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien who had decided not to meet him privately during the summit, Dr Mahathir said: "I think the Canadian Prime Minister spoke to me ... and I spoke to him."

Asked whether it was appropriate for Chretien to have called off the bilateral talks, the Prime Minister said he could not meet all the leaders. "There are 20 of them and I could only meet a number of them," he said.

He was also asked whether it was humiliating that there were demonstrations when Queen Elizabeth visited Malaysia for the Commonwealth Games in September.

"No ... we see demonstrations everywhere. Both times I was in Vancouver, there were a lot of demonstrations during the CHOGM and the last Apec," he said.

On the other hand, the Prime Minister said one Apec leader told him that he was surprised not to see soldiers or tanks along the road and that the leaders were able to travel freely.

"The leader said the Press made it seem that the place was up in flames and there were riots but he did not see anything. This was one of the leaders. Not one of the friendly leaders ... one of the less friendly ones," he added.

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