

PM hopes ties with US will improve

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ALOR STAR, Thurs: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hopes that relations between Kuala Lumpur and Washington will improve now that George W. Bush is the US president-elect.

He said the relationship should be one based on mutual respect.

Asked what the US foreign policy would be like under Bush, and how this would affect Malaysia, Mahathir said it would have been different if Al Gore had won the election.

"I do not believe that Bush will come here and make a speech asking the *rakyat* to go against the government," he said.

"I hope Bush's victory will

restore the good ties between the two countries."

Mahathir was speaking to reporters on arrival at Sultan Abdul Halim airport here for a one-day visit today.

This evening, he and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali visited Pekan Rabu and broke fast at Felda Bukit Tangga's Changlon mosque.

On another matter, Mahathir said that although he had met members of the Federation of Peninsula Malay Students (GPMS), he had yet to read the 100-point statement of demands made by them today.

He said if the federation had made demands, he would consider whether they should be entertained.

"I have met them. However, they did not mention anything about the statement of demands. I have not read the statement yet ... give

me time to read it before I comment," he said.

The federation said today it would submit 100 demands to the government if the Malaysian Chinese Organisations Election Appeals Committee (Suqiu) refused to withdraw its demands, which, among others, reportedly called for the abolition of the special rights and privileges of the Malays.

GPMS's demands include having the post of the prime minister gazetted as the exclusive right of the Malays, and increasing the bumiputra quota in public and private institutions of higher learning to 70% and 60% respectively.

Mahathir said "this kind of situation will create disagreement between two parties and we have to settle it. If not, the unity that we have nurtured for 43 years will be destroyed".

On the opposition parties' alleged call for *intifada*, the prime minister said if that happened here, it would make matters worse.

He said Parti Keadilan Nasional and PAS were accusing the government of being ruthless and comparing it to Israel in its treatment of the Palestinians.

"They picture us (the government) as ruthless as the Zionists and are organising an *intifada* movement against us. I know what they are doing ... in future they will throw stones at us, like the Palestinians are forced to do against Israeli soldiers," he said.

"Then, the foreign press will report that our country is unstable and the *rakyat* is rising up against the government."

He said this would destroy the country economically and politically.