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Malaysia hoping for better ties with US

ALOR STAR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed the hope that Malaysia's relations with the United States would improve under the leadership of its new President.

He believed the foreign policies under George W. Bush, who will become the United States' 43rd President, would be of non-intervention in the country's internal affairs.

"I'm glad Gore (US Vice-President Al-Gore) lost," Dr Mahathir said when asked on the US presidential elections on his arrival at the Sultan Abdul Halim airport in Kepala Batas.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali were here to break fast with settlers at Felda Bukit Tangga in Bukit Kayu Hitam.

"We hope we can revive our relations with the US Government based on mutual respect," he said.

Asked what he thought Bush's foreign policies would be, the Prime Minister said:

"I think Bush's foreign policies will be different from that of Gore."

"I do not believe he will come here and make a speech calling on the people to go against the Government," he said, referring to Gore's controversial speech at the Apec summit dinner in Kuala Lumpur in 1998.

Gore, who was the only speaker at the dinner, had said that among nations suffering from economic crisis "we continue to hear calls for democracy in many languages - people's power, doi moi (Vietnamese for reforms) and reformasi.

"We hear them today, right here, right now among the brave people of Malaysia."

Later, the White House said Gore's comment reflected the views of President Bill Clinton who skipped the Apec summit to monitor a standoff with Iraq over weapons inspection.

Gore's high-handed statement had angered Malaysians, many of whom condemned it, saying it was unbecoming and rude of the US Vice-President as guest of the country to have made such a statement.

In Kuala Lumpur, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar hoped the new US administration would be more open and not have pre-conceived views about Malaysia.

"We hope to improve our ties at all levels and also on the political side," he said.

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