

24/10/2001

Bush finds in Dr M `very good sense of humour'

Sarban Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The White House has described Saturday's meeting between President George W. Bush and Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Shanghai as very warm, with Bush finding the Prime Minister as a person with a "very good sense of humour".

A White House senior official said the two leaders also got along well "after having developed a feeling of being able to communicate with each other."

The official said this in a Press briefing on Bush's meetings with Dr Mahathir and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on the sidelines of the just-concluded Apec meeting in Shanghai.

The transcript of the briefing, held at the Portman Ritz-Carlton in Shanghai on Saturday, was released here today by the US State Department through the US Embassy.

The official said the meeting between Bush and Dr Mahathir was cordial where both leaders discussed ideas which they had forwarded in their recent correspondence.

"They had one phone call, exchange of letters and this meeting, and I think they've developed a feeling of being able to communicate with each other, which was a very good meeting.

"Prime Minister (Dr) Mahathir has a very good sense of humour, which the President appreciated and I think they got along well," he said.

During the meeting, both leaders shared their ideas on the best possible way to check terrorism following the Sept 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the US.

"The President expressed appreciation for the letter earlier this month and they discussed how both Muslims and the Americans share common values of freedom, love of religion and family," the official said.

Dr Mahathir, the official said, told Bush that Muslims never engaged in "terrible things", but there were a few with extreme views who had decided to take action which was totally unacceptable.

The White House also expressed appreciation to Malaysia for its willingness to share information and for extending all other necessary support to help Washington combat terrorism. "Malaysia is being supportive. The President expressed appreciation for support, of what Malaysia has done in information-sharing and other areas of support," the official said.

Asked whether Bush and Dr Mahathir discussed the possibility of an Islamic force moving into Afghanistan, the official said there was no such discussion. He was also asked whether both Bush and Dr Mahathir had discussed the military campaign in Afghanistan and on the Prime Minister's remarks that there would never be a total resolution of the terrorism problem until there was a solution to the Middle East conflict.

To this, the official said: "Well, the Prime Minister did mention that he believed the resolution of the conflict in the Middle East would be important in resolving terrorism over the long term."

The official said Bush had generally said that the US would continue with the campaign in Afghanistan and that it had no intention of targeting or causing civilian casualties.

He said Bush was sorry for the civilian casualties and that every step would be taken to prevent this from occurring.

The official said Dr Mahathir also shared Malaysia's experience in

dealing with the communist insurgency over a 42-year period and more recently with an Islamic militant group comprising Malaysian Muslims.

Asked to elaborate on this, the official said Dr Mahathir said one of the things the Malaysian Government had had to do to tackle the communist insurgency was to go to the region to find out the needs of the people.

To whether Bush had requested both Dr Mahathir and Koizumi to take extra measures to freeze the assets of the al Qaeda movement, the official said this was not specifically done. "(However) Both countries have taken steps in that direction."

The official said Bush and Dr Mahathir had also discussed Indonesia and gave their support to the leadership of President Megawati Sukarnoputri.