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PM hopes for better ties

Sarban Singh; Arni Abdul Razak

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia hopes to improve relations with the United States following the change in administration in Washington.

The Prime Minister conveyed this to US ambassador to Malaysia, B. Lynn Pascoe, who met him at his office in Parliament on Tuesday.

"The US ambassador called on me. I explained the Government's stand towards the new US administration.

"We feel we could probably improve our relationship with the new administration and do away with whatever differences we have had.

"At the same time, I also told him that we are an independent nation. When we feel we have to voice our dissatisfaction, we will continue to do so."

Dr Mahathir said this was important as Malaysia did not want its credibility questioned by any country or accused of taking sides.

He was asked by reporters to elaborate on his meeting with Pascoe.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir had attended a gathering with Information Ministry staff at Angkasapuri.

Malaysia's relations with the US hit a low point after former US Vice-President Al Gore angered Malaysians by expressing support for former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's so-called reformasi movement.

He did this when addressing a function during the 1998 Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) forum meeting here.

(Gore was defeated by George W. Bush in last November's presidential elections).

The US had also attacked the Malaysian judiciary over the Anwar trial verdicts.

Dr Mahathir also advised foreign Governments, especially Asean members, not to interfere in Malaysia's domestic affairs as Malaysia had never done so.

He said they should, instead, be sensitive to the feelings of Malaysians.

He said this when asked to comment on the presence of officials from some foreign embassies and High Commissions at a briefing organised by Parti Keadilan Nasional on Sunday, apparently held to explain Anwar's state of health.

"We don't like foreigners interfering in our domestic affairs. Although some of them have unfavourable views of the Government, we can also call them (the foreigners) any time to explain certain issues but we never did so," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government could also explain such matters to the foreign missions as it had plenty of information which they were not privy to.

"But if we regularly invite them to such briefings, do not be angry if one day they conquer us," he said.

Asked whether the attendance of Singaporean and Indonesian officials at the briefing could jeopardise Asean solidarity, Dr Mahathir said it could.

"Yes. We don't interfere in their domestic affairs and, likewise, they should stay out of ours," he said.

Representatives from the missions of Australia, Britain, Canada, France,

Indonesia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Holland, US, Germany and New Zealand attended the briefing.

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Government's decision not to allow Anwar to seek treatment abroad did not contravene the United Nations resolution on human rights.

Syed Hamid said the briefing had political connotations and was part of Keadilan's political struggle.

On the standoff between China and the US over the detention of an American spy plane, Dr Mahathir said he regretted the incident.

The plane had to make an emergency landing on Hainan Island after colliding with a Chinese fighter aircraft on Sunday.

"In the first place, no country likes to be spied on although this can be done via satellites from faraway," he said, hoping the matter would be resolved soon.

Asked to elaborate on the National Unit Trust Fund announced in the Third Outline Perspective Plan, Dr Mahathir said it would be open to all Malaysians.

He said the details of the fund would be announced during its launching on April 20.