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PM: No need for conditions to meet with Bush

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he did not discount the prospects of having bilateral talks with US President George W. Bush, during the Apec Leaders Summit in Shanghai in October.

However, he said it would all depend on circumstances and the talks would only take place if there was an opportunity to do so.

"I am not rejecting it and I am not saying that I do not want to. Well, if there is an opportunity then we can have the meeting, otherwise it's alright," he told reporters after addressing a Seminar on Racial Tolerance at the Institute of Islamic Understanding (Ikim)'s office at Jalan Langgak Tunku.

Dr Mahathir said it was normal for leaders of different countries to have talks during big summits and thus, there was no question of requesting for bilateral talks.

"That has always been the practice in the past and it is nothing new."

Asked about reports that the US had imposed three conditions for the bilateral talks to be held, Dr Mahathir said he was not aware of it.

"However, I feel that there should not be any conditions attached. If we want to talk, let us sit down and do it. There is no need for conditions."

The conditions relate to the Government's treatment of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, its handling of the Opposition and delay in release of foreign news publications for circulation in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said many people wanted Malaysia to have better relations with the current US Administration and they were trying on their own initiatives to improve the bilateral ties.

"Some of them are businessmen and there are some who have a special interest in Malaysia and would like to see better relations between both countries."

Dr Mahathir was asked on Umno Youth's disagreement over the party's supreme council's proposal to implement meritocracy system for admission into local universities.

"I don't think they disagreed. It's just that they don't understand what this is all about," he said.

He said it was unfortunate that Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein was absent during last Friday's meeting when the proposal was made.

(END)