

PM: Unlike Clinton, Bush listens and that's good

KUALA LUMPUR: Ties between Malaysia and the United States have improved because of the willingness of its present administration to listen to the views of others, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said Malaysia could communicate better with the present government unlike the last one helmed by Bill Clinton.

"I have met President (George W.) Bush, I have talked freely with him. Of course, he may not agree with some of my views but at least he's prepared to listen. This is an improvement certainly," he said in the latest edition of *Asia Inc*, a monthly business magazine.

Dr Mahathir, who is scheduled to meet Bush during a visit to the United States later this month, said it was up to the superpower to not talk about the causes of terrorism.

"That is their view. But I insist that unless you remove the causes, you are going to have more terrorism. In fact, there are more people inclined towards terrorism today than before Sept 11," he said, referring to the terror attacks in the US last year.

He said the Israelis were taking advantage of the fight against terrorism to persecute the Palestinians.

"They don't care, they don't even care for America. If you saw the newspapers, the Israelis have called a dog George Bush, suggesting he doesn't know anything.

"That's the kind of arrogance that is creating a lot of bitterness among Muslims," he added.

Commenting on Malaysia's drive to become a developed country by 2020, Dr Mahathir said the country was on track to grow at a 7% average over the next 18 years. "We wanted 7% growth, but we are achieving 8.5% growth, sometimes nine."