

Mahathir considers trip to US a success

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By SA'ODAH ELIAS

SEPANG: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday returned from a successful three-day trip to Washington, confident that it will be instrumental in improving Malaysia-US relations.

"I consider it a success because I was able to deliver my message and President (George W.) Bush was willing to listen to me.

"It is a morale booster. I was able to make known Malaysia's stand on terrorism, the developments in South-East Asia and other international problems," the Prime Minister told reporters at the

KL International Airport.

Asked whether the Bush administration might interfere in Malaysia's internal affairs, Dr Mahathir said: "We do not ask anything of the US government except for better relations. We hope they will not interfere in our domestic affairs, just as we do not like to meddle in the affairs of other countries."

On the signing of a declaration between Malaysia and the United States to combat international terrorism, Dr Mahathir said: "While we are willing to exchange information, it does not mean that when something becomes our country's business we will

hand it to others."

He said issues that he raised with Bush, especially terrorism and international concerns, were not for Malaysia's benefit alone.

Dr Mahathir said he was satisfied that Bush supported Malaysia's approach and stand on issues like terrorism and Palestine. The US president had been firm on the Palestine state issue despite Israel's Likud party rejecting it.

"This is a positive development towards resolving the Middle East crisis," he said, adding that Bush had also congratulated Malaysia for its role in solving the crisis in Myanmar.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was considering buying the US-made Hornet fighter planes.

"We expressed our interest in buying the latest version of the fighter jet, but was told that its sale to other countries had never been approved before.

"So we proposed a trade-in, that we will trade in our old fighter planes for this much bigger and superior version. This is our proposal, but it will take a long time to be finalised."

On trade, Dr Mahathir said Malaysian manufacturers needed to take advantage of the big domestic market in the

United States.

"I am disappointed that there is no effort to promote our products. I am talking about other manufactured goods besides electronics that we produce and export to the United States.

"There is no initiative at all to introduce our products there. There is no single place where our goods are displayed."

He said the Malaysian embassy in Washington had been directed to provide a space where Malaysian goods could be displayed and called on Malaysian manufacturers to make their products available for display.