

Dr M tells why Malaysia's perception

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MALAYSIA'S perception of the United States has changed in the same way the US has changed its perception of Malaysia, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"Of course when the US began to show some understanding of what is happening in Malaysia, naturally we change our perception of the US as well," he said in an interview on CNN's Q&A programme telecast

from the US early today.

"We were critical because the US was very critical of us (in the past)."

The Q&A is a half-hour programme which provides viewers with the chance to interact with top guests from the world of politics, sport, arts and business.

Dr Mahathir was asked by programme host Zain Verjee if he had changed his perception of the US,

and whether his visit to Washington "was to mend (Malaysia-US) relations".

The Prime Minister said in a way, his three-day visit to the US was to mend bilateral relations.

Dr Mahathir added that relations had already improved after the Sept 11 attacks.

Asked why Sept 11 was a turning point in bilateral ties, he said it was because what Malaysia was doing

of United States has changed

suddenly became relevant to what was happening in other parts of the world.

"And we were able to provide some information about the activities of this (terrorist) group in Malaysia and their possible link to other groups outside Malaysia.

"That, of course, has helped people, especially in the US, to understand about what is happening in Malaysia and how it related to

what's happening in the US."

Other issues touched in the interview included the Internal Security Act; allegations of the Government mistreating Opposition party members; developments in the Middle East; the effects of China liberalising its economy; Malaysia's arms procurement programme; crackdown on illegal workers in the country; and Dr Mahathir's role as a Muslim leader.

Asked whether he saw himself as a moderate Muslim leader, Dr Mahathir said he did not view himself as a leader of the Islamic world, adding that he only saw himself as a Malaysian leader.

On whether he was using the ISA to silence his opponents, the Prime Minister said some 800 detainees were released under his order, including those arrested or detained by his predecessors.