

Mahathir's White House Wish Nears

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Paul Morse/AFP



DREAM HOUSE: Presidential pup, Spot, plays by the White House

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad may finally have his wish for an invitation to the White House granted. Diplomats following Malaysia's relations with the United States say President George W. Bush has invited Mahathir for an official visit in mid-May, though one U.S. official stresses "nothing can be said officially at this point." Mahathir had been largely shunned by Washington after he imprisoned his former deputy Anwar Ibrahim in 1998, but the Malaysian prime minister has greatly rehabilitated his image by cooperating with the U.S. in the war against terrorism. Mahathir met Bush at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Shanghai in October, but U.S. officials give conflicting signals about whether Bush or Secretary of State Colin Powell raised concerns about the continuing imprisonment of Anwar following conviction on charges of sodomy and abuse of power. In an apparent effort to bolster Malaysia's image in the U.S. ahead of Mahathir's visit, companies seen as close to the prime minister took out a three-page advertisement in *The New York Times* on March 21 trumpeting the strengths of the Malaysian economy. The Malaysian embassy, meanwhile, is hosting a conference on Malaysia in Washington on April 2-3.