

01 JAN 2002

Mahathir-America

KL WISHES TO IMPROVE TIES WITH WASHINGTON, SAYS PM

By: E.Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia wishes to improve its relations with the United States under the administration of President George W.Bush, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Malaysian government does not have any problem with the Bush administration, Dr Mahathir said in the "Wawancara BERNAMA dengan Perdana Menteri" programme aired over RTM and Astro tonight.

"As we know, the previous US administration (under President Bill Clinton) made direct criticisms on us.

"In fact its Vice-President (Al Gore) came here and encouraged certain people to topple the government. But the present government in the US does not do this. It is therefore easier for us to have communication with the new government," he said.

Ties between Kuala Lumpur and Washington were strained after Al Gore hailed Malaysia's "Reformasi" supporters who staged demonstrations as "brave", in his speech at the Apec Business Advisory Council dinner here in November 1998.

Asked about present US-Malaysia ties, Dr Mahathir said: "It is better now than before."

He said the government did intend to mend ties with the Bush administration before the Sept 11 attacks on the US.

"But in the wake of the Sept 11 incident, our country as a Muslim country has emerged in the international arena as the only Muslim nation that is progressive, democratic and stable," he said.

On his meeting with Bush at the Apec summit in China recently, Dr Mahathir said the US now probably better understood several actions taken by Malaysia in dealing with certain issues, including terrorism.

"I think it is true because I met President Bush in a situation where America also faced the problem of threat to its security and definitely he would better appreciate how, why we used our approach to tackle the security problem in our country.

"With that, he may better understand what was done by Malaysia because he is also facing the same problem," he said.

The Prime Minister said he had no plans to visit the US for now.

"But I may go to the US to attend a forum in New York organised by the European Economic Forum. And if I go, I may meet him (Bush) there, and possibly at other times. I'm not sure," he added.

-- BERNAMA

ES ES SK