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PRESIDENTIAL GUESTHOUSE BEING PREPARED FOR DR MAHATHIR

By: E.Sivabalan

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is scheduled to arrive here Monday for a four-day official visit, will be staying at the prestigious United States President's official guesthouse at 1651, Pennsylvania Avenue.

Known as the Blair House, it is located a few metres from the White House and was once occupied by US President Harry Truman and his family from 1948 to 1952 while the White House was undergoing renovation.

Built in 1824, its first owner was Dr Joseph Lovell, the first surgeon general of the US Army. Francis Preston Blair, a newspaper publisher from Kentucky, bought the house in 1836 and his descendants continued to live at Blair House for over 100 years.

Blair was a member of President Andrew Jackson's "kitchen cabinet", a term originating here, because it often met informally in the Blair House kitchen.

During the civil war, Blair at President Abraham Lincoln's request, offered Colonel Robert E. Lee command of the Union Army. Lee declined the offer so that he could serve the Confederacy.

Lee's cousin, Samuel Phillips Lee, an Admiral in the Union Navy, married Blair's daughter, Elizabeth in 1843 and they lived in the house next door built for them by Blair. Their son, Blair Lee, became a US senator from Maryland, and his grandson, a governor of Maryland.

Both the Blair House and the Lee House were purchased by the federal government during World War II and became the president's official guesthouse.

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