

Timber given to Mugabe as a gift, says Dr M

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PUTRAJAYA: Sawn timber given to Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe several years ago was a gift and was meant to promote Malaysian products, said former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

And if that was considered an abuse of power, Dr Mahathir said that he was ready to face the music.

"Giving presents to one's counterpart is a normal practice among world leaders. When I was the Prime Minister, I gave presents to many state leaders and received

many in return.
"If that is considered an abuse of power, then I am ready to face the consequences as I have never considered myself immune from the laws of the country."

Dr Mahathir said the value of the timber was less than RM100,000.

He told a press conference at his office at the Perdana Leadership Foundation here yesterday that he wished to clarify the matter because he did not want other people to be "burdened and held responsible" for his action while he was in office as

the issue had been raised in Parliament.

Mugabe told British Sky News in an interview last month that, among others, Malaysia and China had funded his £5mil (RM34.6mil) 25-bedroom mansion near Harare.

Dr Mahathir said: "As the Prime Minister (then), I was entitled to give gifts to foreign heads of government and my counterparts," when asked if the gift had been approved by the Cabinet.

Aside from gifts to heads of states, local timber was also given to

world organisations such as the United Nations, Unesco and the International Labour Organisation in a bid to promote the product.

"When we gave gifts, we gave them to legitimate leaders. We couldn't foresee what would happen to these leaders or what they would do after the gifts had been presented to them.

In Kuala Lumpur, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the gift was given with the best of intention to build links with African countries.