

12/06/2004

Dr M: Timber valued at RM100,000 a gift from head of government

PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - The timber given to Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe was not a personal gift, said former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

It was a gift from a head of government to a foreign head of state, which is the usual practice among world leaders, he said.

"If he had not been a President, we would not have given it to him. We gave it to him in his capacity as President," he told a Press conference at the Yayasan Kepimpinan Perdana today.

It was recently reported that Malaysia had given timber to Mugabe for the construction of his five million pound (about RM34 million) mansion in a suburb near Harare.

Dr Mahathir said the timber, valued at RM100,000, was given to Mugabe after learning that the president was planning to construct a building.

He said it was for wood panelling in the house.

He said he could not have foreseen that foreign leaders who received gifts from Malaysia would later be considered dictators, corrupt or evil persons.

The Government had in the past given timber to many world bodies, such as the United Nations and Unesco, he added. It had also given furniture to the International Labour Organisation to introduce Malaysian timber products.

He said if presenting the gift to Mugabe was considered an offence, he was prepared to be charged for allegedly abusing his power.

"It will not be a problem to me. I have carried out my duties sincerely and I practised what is being done by other national leaders."

On reports that have given the impression that the Malaysian Government had funded a large portion of Mugabe's mansion, Dr Mahathir said it was British propaganda as they hated Mugabe for repossessing land from the Whites.

"Mugabe is my friend but I befriend all people. Fujimori is also my friend and so is Pak Harto (former Indonesian President Suharto)," Dr Mahathir said.

(END)