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`Malaysia did give timber to Mugabe'

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today confirmed that Malaysia gave timber to Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe for the construction of his STG5 million (about RM34 million) mansion in a suburb near Harare.

He said there was nothing extraordinary about the gift, as this was the usual practice to promote Malaysian timber.

"Yes, we did give Zimbabwe timber, but what's wrong with that?" he said adding that there were no irregularities involved.

The former premier was responding to allegations that the timber donation amounted to misuse of public funds.

He said this after launching the autobiography of the late Datuk Dr Alijah Gordon at Carcosa Seri Negara today.

It was earlier reported that DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang had called for a ministerial statement to clarify if the Government had indeed funded the 25-bedroom mansion.

This follows a British Sky News interview last month which reported Mugabe as saying that Malaysia and China had funded his mansion.

At the launch were many close friends and acquaintances of the late Dr Gordon, an American by birth who became a Malaysian citizen several months before her death last year. They came together to pay tribute to her memory and to testify how she changed their lives and those of many unfortunate people.

Dr Gordon was well-known for her tireless humanitarian work, especially in fighting for the rights of Palestinians.

A friend to many, she baffled those closest to her on where she drew her strength from, and how she kept alive the spirit to serve others.

Her autobiography, *On Becoming Alijah*, focuses on the American Revolutionary War through Burma. It gives some insight into her fight for the underprivileged.

The book was put together by the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, of which Dr Gordon was the former chairman.

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