

Fee paid to meet Bush

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But the purported RM1.2mil did not come from Govt, says Dr M

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PENANG: Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad admits that "somebody" paid a lobby fee - purportedly US\$1.2mil (RM4.56mil) - to arrange his meeting with United States president George W. Bush in 2002.

"I don't think the (Malaysian) Government paid. But I must admit the Heritage Foundation (a US think tank) arranged it.

"They talked me into meeting Bush because they said I would be able to influence him in some way regarding US policies.

"Secondly, it would be good for Malaysia if the relationship between Malaysia and the United States improved.

"I agreed with that. I thought I could do something. This was for the good of the country," Dr

Mahathir said after delivering a public lecture, *Developing The Nation*, at Universiti Sains Malaysia here yesterday.

"It is true that somebody paid. But I don't think it was the Government," he added.

A recent report in the *Los Angeles Times* said the Malaysian Government called on a lobbyist when it arranged for a meeting between Bush and Dr Mahathir in 2002.

The report claimed that the lobbyist was paid US\$1.2mil by the Malaysian Government for his services in 2001 and 2002.

E-mails of the report and a photograph of Dr Mahathir shaking hands with Bush were circulated online recently.

The *Washington Post* recently reported that the number of lobbyists in the US capital has doubled since 2000 to more than 34,750 while the amount



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the lobbyists charge their new clients has increased by as much as 100%.

Experts say the lobbying boom has been caused by rapid growth in government, Re-

publican control of both the White House and Congress, and widespread acceptance among corporations that they need to hire professional lobbyists to secure federal benefits.

Dr Mahathir said in the United States, the practice to see a leader was to go through a lobbyist, who had to be paid.

"I did not touch the money. But, I think somebody paid. That is their practice," he said. "That is their system. It is not corruption at all. It is very open."

Earlier this year, high-flying Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff pleaded guilty to conspiracy, fraud and tax evasion in a deal to cooperate in a federal corruption probe in Washington.

He once described Native Americans as tribes and his clients - from whom he

got an estimated US\$66mil (RM245mil) - as monkeys, troglodytes and idiots.

He could be jailed up to 11 years and made to pay US\$26.7mil (RM99.3mil) in retribution.

Abramoff admitted to corrupting government officials and defrauding his own clients of US\$25mil (RM93mil).

Dr Mahathir also talked about the *Bangsa Malaysia* policy, which he said was achievable but might take a long time.

"When the Malays feel less fearful of being overwhelmed economically by non-Malays and compete openly and succeed when they reduce their fears, the policy can be achieved," he said.

"The Malays must show the Chinese and Indians that there is no intention to be unfair to them."