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Bush praises PM for his good leadership

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WASHINGTON: President George W. Bush has described Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's leadership as a very constructive force for Southeast Asia.

He said Malaysia was an interesting example of how a free society could deal with movements that could conceivably change and alter the nature of free society.

"I respect the way the prime minister has used freedom and the openness of society to deal with frustration. I mean, all societies have frustrated people. The question is will the outlet of that frustration lead to violence or peace," Bush said in a roundtable on Thursday with five journalists from the Asia Pacific, including one from Bernama.

"Malaysia is an example of a country where frustrations have been channelled in a positive way.

"I respect the prime minister

and admire his leadership," Bush, who met Abdullah at the White House in 2004, said when commenting on Abdullah's leadership in handling extremism and terrorism in the country.

Abdullah is a proponent for moderation, advocating Islam Hadhari (Civilisational Islam) in Malaysia and everywhere he goes.

The camaraderie between the two leaders could be seen when the president said: "When his wife (the late Datin Seri Endon Mahmood) died, I tried to call him early just to let him know I cared about him."

When told that Abdullah had remarried, Bush appeared surprised and said: "Has he? Good. I'll congratulate him. Thanks for giving me that heads-up. I'm going to congratulate him. That's neat."

When told by his aide that he had already done so, Bush laughed at his memory lapse and

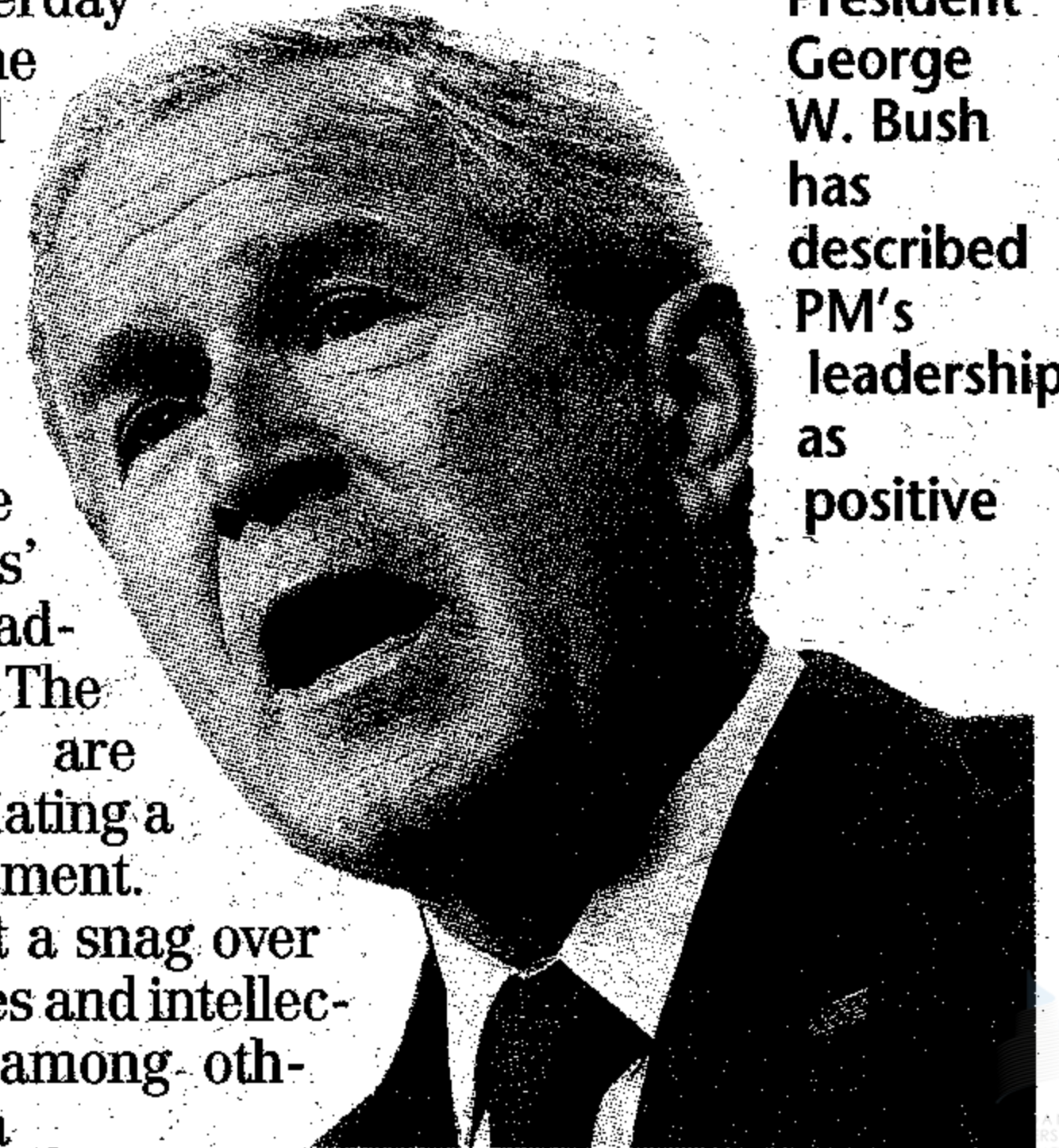
said: "Exactly. I'm going to congratulate him again. I'll double the congratulations."

He later admitted that he forgot and asked his aide whether he had called or written a note to the prime minister.

The president congratulated Malaysia on its 50th Independence Day yesterday

and said he looked forward to continuing meaningful discussions on the bilateral free trade agreement with the United States' 10th largest trading partner. The two countries are currently negotiating a free trade agreement.

Talks have hit a snag over financial services and intellectual property, among others. — Bernama



President George W. Bush has described PM's leadership as positive