

26/04/1997

Move aimed to change Israeli mindset: PM

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MALAYSIA'S decision to allow Israeli students and cricket team into the country recently was an "extraordinary" move aimed at changing the mindsets of the Israelis towards Islam and the Muslims.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it was not an act of betrayal to the Muslim world.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia is not only the biggest supporter of Palestine but also of other Muslims wherever they may be.

"But do we want to remain enemies without finding a solution for peace?" he shot back when responding to a question raised by a participant of the Oxford Islamic Forum on "The Islamic World and Global Cooperation: Preparing for the 21st Century."

The participant had asked Dr Mahathir about relations between Malaysia and Israel after the Government last month allowed the Israeli cricket team to participate in an international tournament held in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir said in the teachings of the religion, "if one offers a hand in peace, we have to accept it".

"There is more to a struggle than just killing and shooting each other or throwing stones ... We want to show them that there are people of many races and religions here who live together in harmony.

"They (the Israelis) have never seen Muslims outside their own area. Having them here, we could prove to them that the Muslims are peace-loving people.

"As such, we should not support people like (Benjamin) Netanyahu (Israeli Prime Minister) who likes to make enemies because they cannot be good leaders.

"We have to expose these leaders so that they will not get any support from their own people. In this way, we can lessen the impact of extremists like him," he said.

However, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia and Israel will not have any diplomatic relations unless Tel Aviv honours the peace accord it signed with Palestine.

"The Israeli Government had repeatedly pressed for diplomatic relations with Malaysia but we said no because we are not satisfied with their attitude towards the peace process with the Palestine," he said.

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