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Dr M glad Jewish group accepted explanation

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today welcomed the World Jewish Congress's statement which accepted the Malaysian explanation that he was not anti-Semitic, saying that the matter should now be put to rest.

Speaking to reporters after meeting Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah at the Shangri-La Hotel, Dr Mahathir said neither he nor Malaysia was against any race.

He was asked to comment on the statement by the executive director of the WJC Elan Steinberg who was quoted as saying yesterday that as far as the Congress was concerned, the matter had come to an end.

"Well, I am glad to hear that. I have never been anti-Semitic. We have been instrumental in allowing the Israeli cricket team to come here.

"We also brought Israeli students here so that they can see that Muslims can live with other people. This might help them understand that it is possible to live with the Arabs too."

Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva Hamidon Ali had in a letter, dated Feb 20, to the Commissioner of the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights denied that Dr Mahathir was anti-Semitic.

The WJC made the letter public and praised its contents.

The letter was written by Hamidon after he met the WJC representative in Geneva, Morris Abram.

It said the Prime Minister was mindful of the need to restrain from making racist remarks as it could be disastrous for a multi-racial country like Malaysia.

Stressing that anti-Semitism had never been a policy in Malaysia, Hamidon had stated that to allege that Dr Mahathir was anti-Semitic would be unfair and a sad misreading of the Prime Minister's philosophy and convictions.

Asked to comment on Steinberg's remarks that the matter should be put to rest, Dr Mahathir said:

"Well, I am glad that it has been put to rest because I don't see a point in having a quarrel with anybody. I don't want to quarrel with them. I welcome the statement, of course."

Dr Mahathir had clarified on several occasions that he did not say that a Jewish conspiracy was behind the attack on several Southeast Asian currencies.

He said he was misquoted by the Press.

DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang also welcomed the WJC statement.

He added in a statement that the controversy was an unnecessary distraction to the current economic problems faced by the country.

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