

Dr M: Palestine issue must be solved first

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SERDANG, Fri: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he had refused written requests from former Israeli premiers Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak to have bilateral relations.

He said he wrote to them that Malaysia will not establish ties with Israel until it settles its dispute with Palestine.

Mahathir also said he once wrote a congratulatory letter to Barak on his election victory, urging the latter to keep his promise of settling the decades long conflict with Palestine.

"Just because we do not have bilateral relations does not mean that we cannot correspond.

"Our stand on Israel is clear ... we have always chided it for its treatment of Palestine.

"And every Jew knows what I think of them," he said in countering allegations that Malaysia befriended Israel despite the country's cruel actions against Muslim Palestinians.

Responding to a question from a University Putra Malaysia student during a dialogue held in conjunction with his visit to the university, Mahathir said: "Whoever says we have relations with Israel is lying and you should not do that during the fasting month."