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Role of Ottoman Empire a missing link in Palestine-Jerusalem history

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I WOULD like to refer to the "World Focus" page (NST, July 29), where the Arab-Israeli conflict on Palestine is explained and the latest developments in Camp David II talks are highlighted.

I noticed two information boxes on the page, which do not reflect the true history of Palestine and Jerusalem, and therefore suffer a serious omission. The first box is entitled "Palestine - A historical sketch", and the second box is entitled "Jerusalem's history".

Here below is the true history of Palestine and Jerusalem. The Mameluk Sultan Salahaddin Eyyubi defended Jerusalem against the overwhelming Crusaders and did not surrender the city to them. Salahaddin Eyyubi was an Egyptian and when defending Jerusalem against the Crusaders, he had the support of the Jewish community. This co-operation showed that there was no enmity between the Muslims and the Jews at that time.

A serious missing link in the NST version of the Palestine and Jerusalem history is the Ottoman Empire period. The Ottoman Empire, Muslim and Turkish by nature, encompassed the entire Middle Eastern territory up to Egypt in 1516 and Egypt in 1917. Palestine and Jerusalem remained under control and as part of the Ottoman Empire until 1917, a complete 400 years. Therefore, it is the Ottoman Turks who ruled Jerusalem until 1917 and not the Mameluks.

During the Ottoman Empire's rule there was no dispute over Jerusalem whatsoever, among the Muslim, Jewish, Catholic Christian and Armenian Orthodox communities. All these communities lived side-by-side peacefully. The peaceful co-existence among the communities of the empire was provided by the Ottoman rule, not by use of force, but by tolerance. The Ottoman Empire was an Islamic State, but affectionate and tolerant to its non-Muslim citizens.

The British and French armies defeated the Ottoman forces in the Middle-Eastern fronts during World War I and forced the Ottomans to withdraw from the region in 1917. In the course of World War I, the Arabs of the region, inspired by the British and French, and tempted by promises of independence, collaborated with them and fought against the Ottoman army.

In this respect, allow me to quote the related excerpts from the statement of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the 27th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Kuala Lumpur, on June 27.

"Instigated by the British and French, the Arab subjects of the Turkish Empire collaborated with the enemies of Islam to liberate themselves from Turkish rule. And when the dust settled on the remains of the Turkish Muslim Empire, the Arabs found that they had exchanged Turkish rule for British and French rule."

I believe Dr Mahathir's words are self-explanatory.

Left entirely to the mercy of the Western powers, Palestine was divided in 1947 between Arabs and Jews (44 and 56 per cent respectively). Today, however, under the Oslo accords, the Palestinians have administration rights in only four separate enclaves, making up no more than a few per cent of their territories.

All political developments in the post-World-War I history of the Middle East have shown that no political entity could fill the power vacuum of the Ottoman Empire, even until today.