

Apologise to PM, news agency and reporter told

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PETALING JAYA: A foreign news agency and one of its journalists here have been told to apologise to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad over an article purportedly quoting him as saying that Israelis were terrorists.

A statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya yesterday stated that the article by Sean Yoong of the Associated Press titled *Malaysia's Mahathir criticises attacks on Afghanistan* was "incorrect and mischievous."

"Mr Yoong, intentionally or otherwise, had chosen to take the Prime Minister's statement out of context and referred the statement to the US and British attacks on Afghanistan when this was clearly not the case," the statement read.

Yoong's article had stated: *Mahathir repeated calls for a summit of world leaders to reach an internationally acceptable definition of terrorism, and he criticised Israel. "If they wanted to take action, they should pick the right people," Mahathir said of the US and British strikes. "I would support them if they wanted to*

take terrorist action against Israel, because Israel has shot dead many Palestinians. For us, those are the terrorists."

The Prime Minister's Office said the correct translation of Dr Mahathir's statement, made in response to a parliamentary question on terrorism, was recorded in the Hansard of Oct 8, 2001.

It reads:

"These terrorists acts that were carried out were supposedly part of a jihad. Maybe it was caused because the perpetrators had been victims of terrorism themselves and they wanted to retaliate. But what is unacceptable is that others too were made victims including those from Malaysia who had not committed any terrorism against Palestinians. Those who had committed terrorism against the Palestinians were the Israelis. Retaliate against Israel then. Those who were killed in the attacks on the WTC building included many foreigners who had nothing to do with the terrorists acts committed by the Israeli authorities. Therefore, if they wanted to take any action, they should pick on

those who had acted against them, and I would support them if they had committed these terrorist acts against Israel because Israel has killed many Palestinians."

The Prime Minister's Office said at no time did Dr Mahathir urge world leaders or the US and Britain to attack Israel as implied by Yoong's article.

"Furthermore, while the Prime Minister had stated that Israel has committed what we perceived to be terrorist acts against the Palestinians, nowhere in his answer did he state that Israelis were terrorists."

The Prime Minister's Office said it was unfortunate Yoong's article was picked up by several foreign newspapers including the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, *The Independent*, and the *Belfast Telegraph*.

"Given the far-reaching consequences of Mr Yoong's mistakes, we demand that Mr Yoong and Associate Press issue a correction for the above mentioned article and a public apology to the Prime Minister of Malaysia."