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PM misquoted in article

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PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - The Prime Minister's Office today demanded that the Associated Press and its reporter issue a correction and an apology over its erroneous report on the statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad over the United States-led attacks on Afghanistan.

In a statement today, the PM's office said the article by reporter Sean Yoong, headlined Malaysia's Mahathir criticises attacks on Afghanistan, was incorrect.

In his report, Yoong 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 had shot dead many Palestinians. For us, those are the terrorists."

The PM's office said the above statement was incorrect and mischievous as the Prime Minister was not referring to the US and British strikes in his statement regarding Israel.

It said the correct translation of Dr Mahathir's statement, which was made in response to a Parliamentary question on terrorism, and as recorded in the Hansard of Oct 8 is as follows:

"These terrorist 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 the Palestinians.

"Those who had committed the 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 terrorist 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 had killed many Palestinians."

The PM's office said 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.

It said it is quite clear from the Hansard that the Prime Minister was referring to the attacks on the WTC in New York.

"At no time did the Prime Minister urge world leaders or US and Britain to attack Israel as was clearly implied in Yoong's article.

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

The statement said it can only guess where Yoong had heard the comments and assumed that he was present at Parliament when the Prime Minister was speaking.

The PM's office said Yoong's incorrect 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 Yoong's mistakes, we demand that Yoong and the Associated Press issue a correction and a public apology to the Prime Minister of Malaysia," it said.