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`Double standards at work'

reports on "OIC Summit 2003" by Ashraf Abdullah; Kamarulzaman Salleh; DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday it was double standards at work that one could not criticise the Jews without being labelled anti-Semitic but it was all right for them to call Muslims terrorists.

Setting the record straight that the Malaysian Government had not apologised for his statement on Jews as reported by the foreign Press, the Prime Minister said:

"It is grossly unfair and a manifestation of the bias against Muslims that there is such an attitude that you cannot criticise the Jews without being called anti-Semitic.

"On the other hand, Jews and others can call Muslims terrorists. There are other terrorists; there are Christian terrorists (such as) Catholic terrorists in Northern Ireland, there are Hindu terrorists and even Buddhist terrorists in Japan."

Foreign media put a spin on Dr Mahathir's speech at the opening of the OIC Summit on Thursday, giving the impression that he was anti-Semitic. As a result, various organisations criticised Dr Mahathir.

Expressing regret that his references to the Jews in his speech had been twisted and taken out of context, Dr Mahathir explained what he truly meant.

"What I said in my speech was that we should stop all the violence, all the killings, all the suicide bombings and massive retaliation.

"Instead, we should pause and think what we should be doing. In other words, I am against violence and terrorism," he said, speaking at a Press conference after the closing of the Summit at the Putrajaya Convention Centre.

Punching holes in their argument, the Prime Minister said Arabs were also a Semitic people.

"So, being anti-Semitic means I am against Arabs and Jews as well. That is very even-handed because I am against both, not just one. In fact, what I had stated about Jews, Arabs or Europeans are just based on facts."

Dr Mahathir said he was surprised with the suggestion that something should be done to stop him from making statements because it ran contrary to the advocacy of free speech.

"I am quite surprised that anybody should suggest that I should be stopped from making statements of whatever kind. Lots of people make nasty statements about us, about Muslims. People call Muslims terrorists, they even say that the Prophet of the Muslims, Muhammad, was a terrorist."

Dr Mahathir said people making the statements seemed to get away with it.

"But if you say anything at all against the Jews, then you are accused of being an anti-Semite. Are we not allowed at all to criticise the Jews if they do things that are wrong?"

Dr Mahathir said what he said in his speech was that Muslims and Jews should stop killing each other.

On whether he agreed that interanational satellite news agency CNN and the Associated Press wire agency, which manipulated his statement and took it out of context to make it look as if he was anti-Semite, did not understand the language in which he delivered his speech, Dr Mahathir said:

"I thought it was English. But maybe my English was bad, and that was why they could not understand."

On the condemnation he received from the European Union and the United States over his speech, with comments from Australian leaders saying that Dr Mahathir was taking the line of Osama bin Laden's call for jihad against the Jews and other enemies of Islam, the Prime Minister said it would seem that some people did not appreciate him suggesting that acts of terror be stopped.

"They would like to see acts of terror go on. Perhaps this would give them an excuse to take pre-emptive action?"

"Of course, Australia has now been designated the sheriff, not the deputy sheriff, but the sheriff.

"I can assure Australia that if it acts as the sheriff in this country, it will be treated as a terrorist and dealt with as a terrorist."

Dr Mahathir then added in jest: "My Foreign Minister (Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar) will back me up on this."