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International media twisting Dr M's words

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THE International media organisations have done it again. So used to compromising journalism's cardinal principles of accuracy and good faith, they have again portrayed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as anti-Semitic.

They gave the usual spin to Dr Mahathir's speech at the opening of the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference Summit on Thursday, and gave the international audience the impression that he is urging the Muslim world to wage war against Israel.

Those who have taken the time to read Dr Mahathir's speech in full will dismiss these reports as inaccurate and bordering on idiocy. Dr Mahathir's speech is not difficult to comprehend. It is simple and straight to the point. But obviously, some did not get the real message.

Malcolm Cole of the Herald Sun of Australia quoted Dr Mahathir as asking the Muslims to go to war with the Jews to bring down the Jewish people. He went on to say that this had prompted accusations that Dr Mahathir was acting like Osama bin Laden.

Rohan Sullivan, Kuala Lumpur-based Associated Press correspondent, implied that Dr Mahathir was a racist, saying that during the 1992-95 war in Bosnia, he welcomed thousands of Muslim refugees but rejected the Christians.

This allegation is totally untrue and made with malicious intent.

The bureau chief of Agence France Presse in Kuala Lumpur Lawrence Bartlett described Dr Mahathir as one who "shoots from the lip".

And when Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar clarified yesterday that Dr Mahathir was not anti-Semitic and said he was "sorry that the speech was misunderstood", the foreign media went to town with reports that "Syed Hamid apologised for Dr Mahathir's remarks".

The word "sorry" was taken out of context. Syed Hamid should have used a better word.

The CNN, recently criticised by its own correspondent who said he had to toe the line on Washington's "instructions" to slant its reports during the US invasion of Iraq, quoted Jewish leaders as saying Dr Mahathir's remarks would spark fresh attacks on Jews.

If Dr Mahathir's speech is read in totality, it will occur to the reader that he is calling for peaceful co-operation with all countries and for Muslim countries not to antagonise anyone.

In fact, he asked Muslims to win the hearts and minds of their detractors. He was merely saying that if the Muslim nations unite, they will be a force to be reckoned with and will not be oppressed.

The world knows that Dr Mahathir is a blunt opponent of war and condemns terrorism.

The international media is always giving a spin to Dr Mahathir's statement.

In 1997, Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying that efforts to impede the economy of Malaysia and other Muslim countries were due to the conspiracy of the Jews. The Prime Minister made no such remarks, but those were the reports which came out in the foreign media.

When the Prime Minister's Office issued a correction, the foreign media simply ignored it. Therefore, Dr Mahathir remained, in the eyes of some, anti-Semitic.

As a result, several US Congressmen took the matter to Congress and the

US almost denounced Malaysia as a racist state. Fortunately, Congress knew better and the resolution brought by a few Congressmen was thrown out without debate.

The fact is, the Malaysian Government is not anti-Semitic. One needs no reminder that it was Dr Mahathir's Cabinet which decided to allow the Israeli team to take part in the International Cricket Council Trophy in Kuala Lumpur in April 1997, despite protests by Pas.

Reason, common sense and facts have nothing to do with their deliberate demonising of Dr Mahathir, but because in their masters' scheme of things, he is not as gullible as they want him to be.

A charismatic leader, the Prime Minister outshines the best of leaders in the West, a fact unacceptable to the foreign media.

The foreign news agencies are fond of giving negative portrayals of Dr Mahathir and the Malaysian Government. In Singapore, none of the agencies dares write such reports on the republic or its leaders.

This is because they know very well that they will be shown the door if they do so.

Perhaps it is time the Government took a firmer position on the foreign media based in the country. Perhaps it is also about time the Sullivans and the Bartletts are shown the door.