

Dr M: PN should have barred Israeli plane from M'sian airspace

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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad has criticised Putrajaya for allowing Israeli civilian aircraft to enter Malaysia's airspace.

Malaysia does not have diplomatic relations with Israel.

However, he was ambivalent about an incident where 16 Chinese military planes flew near Malaysian territory.

Speaking in an online press conference this evening, he opined that the government had failed to take into account public opinion on Israel.

"In my opinion, the government should not have allowed the Israeli aircraft to fly in Malaysian airspace.

"Even if they have to go to Singapore, they can go outside Malaysian airspace.

“But I think our government is not conscious about the feelings of the people in the county. People in the country do not want to see Israeli planes flying over Malaysia (skies),” he said when asked.

Last week, the Transport Ministry confirmed that an Israeli civilian Boeing 737-400 had traversed Malaysian airspace on May 19 during a flight to Singapore.

The plane had followed a commercial flight path in light with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) rules.

No abnormal flight patterns or loitering was observed when it was within Malaysia.

“Within the ICAO rules, Malaysia ensures that overflights are approved based on no reasonable grounds on the threats to the safety and security of our sovereignty,” the ministry had said.

China will respect M'sia

On Monday this week, the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) intercepted 16 Chinese military aircraft for flying “suspiciously” near Beting Patinggi Ali (Luconia Shoals).

The Chinese embassy later denied the planes posed any threat, saying the incident involved aircraft in “routine training”.

When asked about this, Mahathir noted that the Chinese planes did not enter Malaysian airspace.

He expected Beijing and Malaysia to make peace over the issue.

“They were reportedly flying near Malaysian airspace, I don’t know whether they actually flew in Malaysian airspace [...]

“I think China will respect Malaysia’s stance on this issue because we are not going to unnecessarily antagonise each other,” he said.

Following the May 31 incident, Foreign Affairs Minister Hishamuddin Hussein said that having diplomatic relations with a country did not deter Malaysia from defending its national security.

He summoned the Chinese ambassador to relay Malaysia’s “serious concern” and also lodged a formal diplomatic protest note over the matter.

The Chinese planes had flown within 60 nautical miles (111km) from the coast of

Sarawak.

Beting Patinggi Ali is part of a longstanding maritime dispute between China and several countries, including Malaysia.

Both Malaysia and China claim sovereignty over the shoals but the latter's claims are not internationally recognised.

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