

# Malaysia played key role in Bosnian peace process

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I DON'T think Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad will win the Nobel Peace Prize. But I wish I would be proven wrong, though.

Dr Mahathir, who was nominated by several Bosnian groups for the peace prize, has ruffled so many feathers, especially those of Western elites, that it is unlikely the Nobel Institute would take the matter any further than to accept the nomination.

However, I am rather sure that his current effort to criminalise the waging of war would fall somewhere in the winner's criteria for the peace prize, going "to the person who shall

have done the most or the best work for fraternity between the nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses".

Regardless of his current initiative, his past efforts in the early 1990s to bring the attention of the world to the war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina should have seen a statue of him erected in downtown Sarajevo.

I was in Sarajevo soon after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement and was greeted by Nato helicopter gunships hovering above the

airport. The officer manning the arrival and departure lounge, which was lighted by a single bare bulb, was extra courteous to me when he noted that I carried a Malaysian passport.

A taxi driver, too, displayed the same kind of reverence to a citizen of Malaysia, and especially to Dr Mahathir, though that did not stop him from fleecing me, as cabbies worldwide are wont to do to foreign visitors.

Dr Mahathir's greatest contribution to the war-torn former Yugoslavia was to bring the world's attention to the atrocities when there were

few willing to even bother looking at the place. For whatever reasons, Europe and the United States were unwilling participants and were standing aside when ethnic cleansing took place, the most famous of which was when 8,000 males were rounded up under the noses of United Nations forces in Srebrenica in July 1995, only to be slaughtered a few hours later.

I am sure efforts by Malaysia and Dr Mahathir to bring the Bosnian issues to public consciousness, and to shame world powers in the process, in some way led the way to a resolution of the crisis.

Some have argued over details of Dr Mahathir's record over the 22 years as a prime minister and that these should make him ineligible for an award of such prestige.

But then there have been many winners who have, at one time or another, promoted violence to achieve their purposes, but had made U-turns later in their lives and became celebrated as champions of peace.

Past winners include Jimmy Carter, Mikhail Gorbachev and Anwar Sadat, seemingly benign heads of government, who had at their disposal the wherewithal to inflict, and

some had probably done so, covert or overt violence over others.

Who can forget Peace Prize winner Henry Kissinger and his tactic to bomb Vietnam to the negotiating table? There were also those who had, one time or another, been branded terrorists — the likes of Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, Menachem Begin and Nelson Mandela. How about apartheid supporter Fredrik Willem De Klerk? All with chequered histories, some of which we accept and others we abhor.

Like I said, I would love to be proven wrong.