

# HATCHET BURIED

## Dr Mahathir now friends with Soros

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** He was once called a rogue, a moron and an enemy of Malaysia. Yesterday, international currency speculator George Soros was absolved of being the culprit behind the 1997 Asian financial crisis and embraced as a friend by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his long-time accuser.

The former prime minister said he accepted Soros' explanation that the billionaire was not personally responsible for the devaluation of the ringgit almost a decade ago.

"The question of forgiveness does not arise. I accepted his explanation. Of course, my view about him (Soros) has changed. That's why I'm talking to him now," Dr Mahathir said, adding that he thought Soros had caused the run on the ringgit based on what he had read in the Press back then.

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# Still at odds on currency traders, but with one accord on global peace

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Malaysia's former premier and the billionaire held a joint Press conference after their meeting here yesterday.

Soros was here to promote his book, *The Age of Fallibility*, and to address the alumni of the London School of Economics at their 20th anniversary dinner last night.

Dr Mahathir said he was still concerned about the activities of currency traders, claiming they could destroy many countries.

Soros, however, said speculators should not be held responsible because it was the duty of the financial authorities to manage the functioning of the market.

"I, as a speculator, have acted according to the prevailing rules. Knowing the market, I believe sometimes it is appropriate to impose some restrictions on capital moves," said Soros, adding that Malaysia's authorities made a mistake in keeping the fixed exchange rate regime for too long.

He, however, conceded that Malaysia's capital controls helped reduce the country's economic damage.

Apart from blaming Soros for the financial crisis, Dr Mahathir has on a few occasions implied a Jewish conspiracy for the world's problems, particularly those involving Muslim countries.

After his heart-to-heart talks with

Soros, who is Jewish, Dr Mahathir explained that he was not against Jews.

"Somehow or other, I have been labelled anti-Semitic. I'm not anti-Semitic, not anti-Jew, but I'm very much against what is happening in Palestine where the Israelis have tried to out-terrorise the Palestinians. That's a wrong way to resolve a

problem."

Blaming the Press, Dr Mahathir said he merely stated that the Jews had a lot of influence in the American government, a view he said Soros did not agree with, but that was his stand.

"I have Jewish friends and most of my friends don't think that I'm anti-Semitic," he added.

Both men told the Press that they did not discuss personal issues during the meeting but were focused on global peace, especially their shared views against the war in Iraq and against many of the international policies of American President George W. Bush.

Soros also managed to convince Dr Mahathir that while he appreciated

the former prime minister's efforts to criminalise war, both of them agreed that in some instances war would be unavoidable.

The billionaire explained that he was in favour of the "responsibility to protect" principle where the international community, and not an individual country, acted against rulers who oppressed their own people.