

THE STAR

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Dr M angered by use of force

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Former PM condemns Tel Aviv's attack against aid flotilla



Emergency treatment: An Israeli paramedic in the northern port of Haifa evacuating a wounded person yesterday. — AFP



Outrage: Palestinian children running next to international flags of countries whose activists participated in the flotilla to the Gaza Strip during a protest at Gaza's seaport yesterday. — AP

PUTRAJAYA: Perdana Global Peace Organisation (PGPO) chairman Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has condemned Israel's interception of an aid flotilla bound for the blockaded Gaza Strip.

"I feel very angry that the Israelis have used force against unarmed people. I am sure the Israelis will say that these people are carrying weapons. That is ridiculous.

"We have made certain that they are all non-combatant and they come from many parts of the world including America and Europe," he said.

"Their intention is to travel in

boats to deliver the supply to Gaza. They know that the Israelis may try to stop them, but we didn't expect the Israelis to resort to such violence as to shoot with live bullets.

"The Israelis claim these people have sharp objects. I don't know what is meant by sharp objects," he told a media conference yesterday.

The flotilla, originally made up of nine ships, was organised by pro-Palestinian groups and a Turkish human rights organisation.

One of the ships, *Mavi Marmara*, was attacked by Israeli soldiers yesterday morning near Gaza.

Two Malaysians – a journalist and a cameraman from Astro Awani – were on board and their fate is unknown. Six PGPO representatives, who are in another ship, are safe.

Dr Mahathir said his order to the PGPO representatives was to go ahead and pull back if there was a warning from the Israeli army.

Updating the location of the three PGPO ships, the former prime minister said they were still in the Mediterranean on the way to Gaza.

He said two ships broke down, thus leaving them a bit far behind to join the other six ships that gathered in Cyprus earlier.

"It will take at least three days for them (Malaysian ships) to reach Gaza," he added.

Asked on his message to US President Barack Obama following the incident, Dr Mahathir said: "He could make promises during the elections like in Malaysia, too. Especially when you thought you were not going to win, you made more promises. When you have won, you find that you cannot fulfil the promises."

"I have said this before. I never thought Obama would be able to do anything against Israel because when addressing the American

Israel Public Affairs Committee, a Jewish lobby group, he was reported to have expressed continued support for Israel," he said.

In his blog, Dr Mahathir wrote that he was horrified at the violence used by Israel to stop ships from carrying humanitarian supplies to Gaza.

"What kind of world are we living in when it allows a rogue state to use violence and killings against unarmed people on a mission of charity?" he asked.

He said international laws and convention were of no consequence to the Israelis.