

# PM DEFENDS BAN ON ISRAELIS

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'It's our right to allow only people we like into Malaysia'

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PRIME Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad firmly defended Malaysia's blanket ban on Israelis participating in events in the World Para Swimming Championships in July.

Dr Mahathir, who was speaking after delivering an address at the Oxford Union here, where he spoke about democracy and the change of the Malaysian federal government, said Malaysia had no diplomatic ties with Israel.

"I don't think they should come to our country because we have no relations with them. And we feel that they will bring in a lot of wrong things and get away with it because nobody dares to say anything against them," he said when questioned by Oxford Union president Daniel Wilkinson, who repeatedly asked him whether it was fair to bar individual Israeli citizens from taking part in the championship.

Last week, the cabinet decided that Israelis would not be allowed to enter the country for any event and this was widely condemned by the Jewish media.

"It is not fair to call me anti-Semitic. They should call other people anti-Semitic. The Arabs are all Semitic people," he said to a round of applause.



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad delivering his address at The Oxford Union in London yesterday. PIC COURTESY OF THE MALAYSIAN HIGH COMMISSION IN LONDON

On why he did not oppose Israel's actions directly, but instead attacked with remarks on the Jewish, he said: "We can't do very much about the Israeli government. They are very powerful. So we don't say very much about the Israeli government. But we don't have to show friendship towards them. If you want to come to our country, we have borders which we guard to allow only people whom we like, to come to Malaysia.

"But people who have done a lot of wrong things, we consider them as unfit to visit Malaysia. That is our right."

When pushed further, he added: "This is a government that doesn't care about the opin-

ion of others. That's why they keep on committing war crimes all the time. I have a right to say it. If they don't like it, they can say they don't like it. I don't care."

Dr Mahathir's Oxford Union address was a full-house event with the hall packed with 400 people. He was accompanied by his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Youth and Sports Minister Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Marzuki Yahya and Foreign Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Muhammad Shahrul Ikram Yaakob.

Questions from the floor focused on Malaysia's relationship with China and Singapore, rang-

ing from "economic colonisation" by China to Huawei's communication tower, the sale of raw water to Singapore and other issues.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether Malaysia had to negotiate its independence from China, having intervened in a large number of Chinese-led development projects.

"When I was in China, someone was talking about the Chinese wanting to dominate. I just pointed out that there are other forms of colonialism, including economic colonialism.

"That is my right to answer. I have to stand up and express my opinion. I cannot be saying nice things to everybody.

"Sometimes, I say nasty things.

They have a right to say nasty things to me."

Dr Mahathir earlier went on a tour of the Old Library, which was the original Woodward debating chamber. The Old Library is best known for its Oxford Union murals.

He leaves for Vienna, Austria, where he is scheduled to deliver a lecture on "Fighting Corruption in Malaysia: Achievements, Challenges, and Perspectives" at the International Anti-Corruption Academy, as well as deliver a keynote address at the 10th General Conference and Annual Meeting of the International Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities.