

Dr M asked to clarify his stand on Holocaust

NEW YORK: Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's scheduled appearance at Columbia University's World Leaders Forum on Wednesday had attracted controversy days before he even landed on United States soil.

Pro-Israel groups had petitioned for the university not to allow Dr Mahathir to speak on campus. They wrote to the university administration and the *New York Post* published an editorial titled "Columbia welcomes hate speech as long as it's anti-Semitic".

Speaking on "Rule of Law and Multilateralism", the dialogue session had stayed on topic for the most part, until a student identifying herself as a member of a campus pro-Israel group asked Dr Mahathir to clarify his stand on the Holocaust.

"I am exercising my right to free speech. Why is it that I can't say something against the Jews when a lot of people say nasty things about me, about Malaysia, and I

didn't protest, I didn't demonstrate."

He said if one believed in free speech, this included a willingness to listen to views that were not in one's favour.

"Free speech is about free speech. When you say, 'You cannot say this. You cannot be anti-Semitic', then there is no free speech."

He recounted how a British journalist was jailed for disputing the number of Holocaust deaths. Similar sentences were handed down on Holocaust deniers in France and Canada.

"I have not disputed them, but I have (asked) who determined these numbers? If it is somebody who is in favour, you get one figure, and somebody who is against will give another figure.

"So, I accept that there was a Holocaust, that there were many Jews killed. In fact, at one time, I was very sympathetic to them during the war, when you were not yet around but I was around at that time."