

Dr M admits wrote to ex-Israeli PM
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 — Former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today confessed to corresponding with his then Israeli counterpart, Ehud Barak, but said this was to convey Malaysia's refusal to recognise the Jewish state.

"I responded saying that Malaysia will not have any ties with them (Israel) for as long as they refused to acknowledge the right of the Palestinians," Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying in a Bernama Online report today.

According to the ex-prime minister, Barak had initiated the exchange to seek a softening of Malaysia's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

Allegations on the existence of this correspondence had surfaced online recently.

Today, Dr Mahathir said he wanted to publicise the letter but was advised against it by his administration.

Malaysia's alleged ties with Israel were again dragged into the spotlight when the Wall Street Journal quoted Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as saying in an interview that he supported "all efforts to protect the security of the state of Israel." He later clarified to say his backing was conditional.

This led to Umno rivals and Dr Mahathir attacking the opposition leader as a Jewish sympathiser.

PKR pressure group Jingga 13 retaliated by highlighting the presence of Israeli vessels in local ports, claiming this affirmed claims that Malaysia had clandestine ties with Israel.

Malaysia is a staunch supporter of Palestine and has no diplomatic relationship with Israel.

Muslim politicians have long vied for support from Malays by denouncing what they say are inhumane acts of aggression by Israel towards its neighbour.

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