

**Hamas Paints Malaysian Premier's Visit as a Stand Against Israel  
The New York Times  
January 22, 2013  
By FARES AKRAM**

GAZA — Prime Minister Najib Razak of [Malaysia](#) visited the  [Hamas](#)-controlled Gaza Strip on Tuesday on what he called a humanitarian mission but Hamas portrayed as a defiant stand against Israeli restrictions on Gaza.

"This is an Islamic declaration for breaking the Israeli siege on Gaza," said Ismail Haniya, the prime minister of Hamas, the Islamic movement, who received the Malaysian premier, his wife and his foreign minister at the Rafah crossing point between Gaza and Egypt. Although [the restrictions have been eased recently](#), most exports from Gaza are still banned.

The visit came as Israelis headed to polling stations for parliamentary elections. Mr. Haniya said he considered Mr. Najib's visit "a [Palestinian](#), Arab and Islamic response" to a visit on Tuesday by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

Mr. Haniya said the Western Wall, known to Muslims as Al Buraq, was "an Arab and Islamic wall," and added, "Jerusalem is Islamic."

In his five-hour visit, Mr. Najib laid the cornerstone of an industrial college his country was financing and signed an agreement with the Hamas government to rebuild the prime minister's office, [which Israel destroyed in November](#) during a bloody conflict with Hamas.

Mr. Najib called on the Palestinians to reconcile, saying he hoped that a recent thaw between Hamas and [Fatah](#), the rival Palestinian faction that controls the West Bank, would lead to a unity government. In May, [Hamas and Fatah agreed in Cairo](#) on a series of measures that pave the way for new elections.

But the tensions between Hamas and Fatah persist. The Fatah leader, President [Mahmoud Abbas](#) of the [Palestinian Authority](#), condemned the visit of Mr. Najib, who is the first leader of a non-Arab Muslim state to visit Gaza since Hamas took full control there in 2007.

"The visit constitutes a harm to the Palestinian representation, boosts the division and does not serve the Palestinian interests," said a statement by Mr. Abbas that appeared on the Web site of the official Wafa news agency.

In October, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the emir of Qatar, became the first head of state to visit Gaza under Hamas's rule, inaugurating rebuilding and development projects estimated to be worth more than \$400 million.

And in November, Prime Minister Hesham Qandil of Egypt visited Gaza for a few hours during the fighting between Israel and Hamas.

Copyright © 2013 The New York Times Company

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/23/world/middleeast/hamas-paints-malaysian-premiers-visit-as-stand-against-israel.html>