

## **Palestine and Para swimming issue: Mahathir opens the eyes of many**

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**By Badrul Aini Sha'ari**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 12 (Bernama) -- Malaysia continued to make the news in the Arabic newspapers of the Middle East following Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement to reject the participation of two Israeli swimmers in the 2019 World Para Swimming Championships which was supposed to take place in Kuching from Jul 29 till Aug 4.

Al-Jazeera guest columnist, Dr Muhammad Al-Umar, praised the Malaysian prime minister for his stand which opened the eyes of many Muslim countries, including Arab nations.

"When these (Muslim and Arab) countries became hosts for any sporting events, they close their eyes and allow the participation of Israeli athletes in the name of sportsmanship and based on the premise of the separation between sports and politics, but Malaysia is bravely confronting the favourite Middle Eastern associate of the US," elaborated Muhammad.

On Jan 28, after attending a closed briefing session in conjunction with the Federal Statutory Body's Higher Management Executive Programme in Putrajaya, Dr Mahathir said he wasn't disappointed with the decision of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) to strip Malaysia's right to host the championship.

"They (IPC) can go ahead and cancel it. I find that the world has to listen to Israel, and I don't understand it because the world have the power but still have to follow Israel...but we didn't follow them."

Malaysia's right to host the event was stripped on Jan 27.

An academician of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven) in Belgium, Dr Muhammad also explained why Malaysia's stand received praises from Arabic newspapers.

“As we know, Israel is supported by superpowers and world economic giants. This is the reason why most countries prefer to play safe with Israel to avoid raising the ire of America and Israel's other allies.

“It's the same scenario with sporting events, where host nations will allow Israel to participate to avoid hosting rights from being revoked. But it's so different with Malaysia because they do not care about this.

“Dr Mahathir could have washed his hands by saying that the agreement to allow the Israeli athletes in the event was signed by the previous government,” elaborated Dr Muhammad.

Recently, Dr Mahathir was the most popular figure in the 'Leader of the Week' category of 'Sibag Al Akhbar'(Hottest World News) chart conducted by Arab news broadcaster Al-Jazeera.

Dr Mahathir obtained 49 per cent of viewers' votes compared to Italy's deputy prime minister Luigi Di Maio (33 per cent), Saudi Arabia cleric Dr Ahmed al-Amari (13 per cent) and United Nations (UN) Special Envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths (five per cent).

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