

In November 1986, the over sensitivity to the PLO cause was again repeated. Following an official visit to Singapore by President Chaim Herzog of Israel, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei submitted an official protest to the Singapore government that chastised this visit for its lack of sensitivity towards the feeling of its Muslim neighbors. Anti Singapore rallies were held in Johor, and effigies of Premier Lee Kuan Yew were burned by protestors.<sup>38</sup> The rally organizer submitted a memorandum to the government calling for stronger actions ranging from a break in diplomatic ties<sup>39</sup> to a review of the water supply agreement with Singapore.<sup>40</sup> In response to these widespread demonstrations organized by various civil society groups, the government temporarily withdrew its High Commissioner from Singapore, and the relations between the two countries were strained for a while.

Another bold and commendable step taken by the Malaysian government was its decision of 12 January 1989; to elevate the office of the PLO in Malaysia to a full-fledged Embassy of the state of Palestine.<sup>41</sup> This movement clearly confirms the government aggressive posture in supporting the *Intifadha*, and was in line with its previous recognition of the state of Palestine.<sup>42</sup> The elevation was, in fact, yet another reflection of Malaysia's strong and unequivocal support to the just demands of the Palestinian for the self-determination and independence.

At the 18<sup>th</sup> Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 13, 1989, the Minister of Foreign Affairs explained in details the position of the Malaysian government in this respect. In his words;

38. *Utusan Malaysia*, 22 November 1986.

39. Submitted to Acting Foreign Minister Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen from the UMNO Youth, see *New Straits Times*, 22/11/1986.

40. *Utusan Malaysia*, 21 November 1986. On the day of the visit, the People's Action Committee, headed by a well known Malaysian poet and writer, Dr. Usman Awang, comprised of the UMNO Youth, PAS, the Chinese based Party, DAP, PSRM and various civil society including PERKIM, ABIM, PKPIM as well as trade Unions launched protest demonstration in front of Singapore High Commission in Kuala Lumpur and handed a memorandum of protest which condemned the visit.

41. *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, March 1989, vol 22, no. 1, p.5.

42. *Ibid.*

"Malaysia is proud to be amongst the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine. As a manifestation of our support, Malaysia has upgraded the PLO office in Kuala Lumpur to full Embassy status. Malaysia earnestly calls the UN secretary General and the members of the UN Security Council to continue taking the necessary efforts for the early convening of an international peace conference in the Middle East. Israel must be brought to its senses that they are going against the tide for peace. Their continued 'iron fist' policy would not serve their objective but instead leads to further suffering."<sup>43</sup>

Another important development during Dr. Mahathir's administration was the signing of peace agreement between the PLO and Israel which had significant impact not only for the Palestinians and Israelis but the Arab States in the Middle East.<sup>44</sup> Commenting on the signing of the peace pact, Dr. Mahathir hoped that it would become an important milestone towards the absolute peace in the Middle East. Malaysian Foreign Minister, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi also commended the Palestinian leadership for its realistic and courageous act in leading the Palestinian people towards a new and promising future.<sup>45</sup>

Support for the Accords, of the concessions made, and the process were not free from criticism. The repeated public posturing of all sides has discredited the process, not to mention putting into question the possibility of achieving peace, at least in the short-term.

Dr. Mahathir also repeatedly voiced out his doubt and criticism on Israel's sincerity with regard to the peace agreement.<sup>46</sup> On December 13, 1994, when delivering his speech at the 8th Islamic Summit Conference in Casablanca, Morocco, he expressed his disappointment by saying;

43. *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, vol. 22, no. 1, March 1989, p. 36.

44. *Berita Harian*, 11 September 1993

45. *New Straits Times*, 13 September 1993.

46. *Berita Harian*, 14 August 1994.