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MALAYSIA DISAGREES WITH U.S. PLAN ON PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP

KUALA LUMPUR, July 17 (Bernama) -- Malaysia does not agree with the Bush administration's plan for a new Palestinian leadership and retaining Yasser Arafat as a symbolic leader of the Palestinian people.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia is of the view that any change in the Palestinian leadership should be determined by the Palestinian people.

"If we allow another country or a major power to determine who should be our leader and what power he holds, then there will be no more freedom in this world," he told reporters at his office here today.

He was commenting on a news agency report quoting U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell as saying that he would be more than willing to consider suggestion that Arafat could be elevated to a figurehead presidency, paving the way for a Palestinian prime minister.

Powell was also reported to have said that the United States believes Arafat has no place in future peace talks.

Dr Mahathir expressed concerned that if the U.S. plan became a reality in Palestine, then it could happen in other countries.

"That we disagree," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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