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Syed Hamid-Powell

M'SIA TO TELL POWELL ITS OPPOSITION TO MOVE TO REPLACE ARAFAT

PUTRAJAYA, July 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will tell U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, during his visit the country at the end of the month, that it is against move by the U.S to replace Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said such interference would be inappropriate and would only back move by Israel to isolate Arafat.

Malaysia, he said would also urge the U.S. to play a positive and effective role in helping to resolve the conflict in Palestine, he told reporters after receiving a call from the Malaysian honorary consul in Casablanca, Morocco, Ahmed Faissel El-Kadiri at his office here today.

Syed Hamid said that if the U.S. wanted peace in the region, it could draw up a formula that would be acceptable to Israel while giving recognition to a free and independent Palestinian state.

"We will also express our views on several issues involving bilateral ties," he said.

Powell will make an official visit to Malaysia on July 29 and 30, before attending the Asean Regional Forum and Asean Foreign Ministers Meeting in Brunei on July 31.

He is also scheduled to visit Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand.

Syed Hamid said that as expected by the Palestinian leadership, Malaysia would continue to raise at the international level the issue on Palestine.

"Israel will do just about anything, including disobeying international law and the U.N. Security Council but get away with it because of the strong support it gets," he said.

Powell was reported to have said recently that he would be willing to consider a proposal to make Arafat a figurehead leader above a prime minister with executive powers.

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

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday also expressed objection to the move, saying that the Palestinians should decide their own leader.

Syed Hamid also said Powell's visit, though short, would be meaningful to Malaysia because of its ties with the U.S., made closer after Dr Mahathir's visit to the U.S. last May.

He said the many visits of late by U.S. officials to the country reflected their confidence in Malaysia in its role in the fight against terrorism.

-- BERNAMA

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