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PM: We don't agree with US action on Arafat

PUTRAJAYA, Sun. - Malaysia is opposed to the United States' declaration of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat persona non grata, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Malaysia did not understand the US action, as expressed by Secretary of State Colin Powell because "known murderers" like Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon were not rebuked.

"I do not agree," Dr Mahathir said after attending the Le Tour de Langkawi 2002 appreciation luncheon at a hotel here.

The launch of the Le Tour de Langkawi 2003, the annual international cycling race, was also held.

"The declaration of other people's leader as persona non grata when leaders like Ariel Sharon, the murderer of innocent people, are embraced as 'Man of Peace'.

"I don't understand the basis for such preferential action ...if Arafat is unacceptable (to the US) then Ariel Sharon should also not be accepted."

It was reported yesterday that Powell had virtually declared Arafat persona non grata and shot down an appeal from the Palestinian leader for an end to Israel's three-week-old re-occupation of West Bank cities.

A wire report from Washington stated that the US State Department would not respond to the appeal, amid mounting US Government pressure for Arafat to step down.

On June 24, US President George W. Bush insinuated that Palestinians should have a new leader but Arafat had rejected the call.