

Envoy: Help Arafat attend summit

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Palestinian authorities have requested Malaysia to talk to the United States to pressure Israel to allow President Yasser Arafat to travel to Malaysia to attend the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit.

Its ambassador, Ahmad Al-Farra, said he hoped that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would take the initiative to talk to Washington on the matter.

He said the US, as a close ally of Israel, was in a position to pressure Tel Aviv to ensure that Arafat could travel here safely and return to Palestine.

Israel, which has occupied several towns and cities in the West Bank and Gaza, had also imposed various levels of travel restrictions on Arafat and other Palestinians.

"We hope Malaysia will do it," he told Bernama when asked on the possibility of Arafat attending the six-day meeting from Feb 20-25 at the Putra World Trade Centre here.



Asked on the possibility of Israel not allowing Arafat back, thus forcing him into exile, Ahmad said the US, as the main player in the West Asia peace process, should also guarantee that Arafat could return safely to Palestine after the summit.

Ahmad said he spoke to Arafat last week and the Palestinian leader had confirmed that he would head the Palestinian delegation to the NAM Summit if there was no problem in travelling to Malaysia.

"We presume that Arafat is leading our Palestinian delega-

tion and this is the normal situation. But to be realistic, Arafat is not a free man now," he said.

Ahmad said Arafat's attendance would enable the Palestinian leader to provide NAM members and leaders with the latest developments in the peace process as well as Israel's atrocities against the Palestinians.

The 74-year-old Arafat, who has dedicated his whole life to the Palestinian cause, is the symbol of its people in their struggle to end more than 50 years of Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian land.

Malaysia has been a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, providing the leadership and the people moral and diplomatic support as well as humanitarian aid.

More than 2,000 Palestinians and more than 700 Israelis have died in clashes in the on-going *intifada*, which was triggered by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to a disputed site in East Jerusalem on Sept 28, 2000.