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Mahathir-Myanmar

CONTINUE DIALOGUE WITH MYANMAR, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 5 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will not isolate Myanmar but will continue to have meaningful dialogue with the Yangon government which is showing signs of change, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said there was evidence that Asean's policy of constructive engagement with Myanmar had brought about changes as the country was slowly opening up.

"Myanmar is a rich country. If we shut them off, they can live for years without any contact with the rest of the world. In fact, that was what they did for almost 20 years, why was there no effort to block them then?" he told reporters after opening the Gerakan national delegates' conference, here.

Dr Mahathir was asked for his views on the United States' ban on members of the Myanmar military junta and their families from travelling to the US.

The US retaliation follows reports of mass detention of hundreds of supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

"I don't think they want to go to the US unless the US prevents them from attending the United Nations which happens to be there. That would be wrong," said Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir said that unlike the US, which is a super power that tended to use force, Malaysia preferred to interact and have meaningful dialogue with Myanmar.

He also said it would be good if Myanmar joined Asean so that the rest of the grouping would be able to have some influence and effect on the Yangon regime.

Asked if Myanmar's membership in Asean would be decided at next month's informal summit of Asean leaders, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know yet. If we have our way, we want them in." -- BERNAMA

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