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Asean-Myanmar

MALAYSIA TO SOUND OUT ASEAN COUNTRIES ON MYANMAR MEMBERSHIP

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 4 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will soon start discussions with its Asean partners on the proposed inclusion of Myanmar as a member of the grouping which will mark the 30th anniversary of its formation next year.

A Foreign Ministry source said today Malaysia wants to seek the views of other Asean members on the matter.

"As an organisation which operates on consensus, it is appropriate that we discuss the matter, so we can see how the others respond as some may raise concerns about Myanmar's membership," he said when contacted today.

The discussions will begin "this month or next month", he added.

Asean currently comprises Brunei, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia.

Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos have said they are keen to join Asean.

Some Western countries, chiefly the United States, have sought to discourage Asean from admitting Myanmar as a member because of the country's alleged human rights abuses.

Asean countries, however, have maintained a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Myanmar.

They have also continued their approach of "constructive engagement" with the Yangon military regime through diplomatic contacts and economic dealings which they believed would help restore democratic rule in Myanmar.

Malaysia has been a strong advocate of Myanmar's membership in Asean. Indonesia is another.

Malaysia reiterated its support when Myanmar's State Law and Order Restoration Council chairman Senior General Than Shwe made a visit here last month.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said Malaysia would help Myanmar to join Asean and hoped it could be realised next year.

Dr Mahathir also said that some member countries might raise objection to Myanmar's entry which he believed "is not going to be that strong".

The source also said that some member countries might object because of the impression that Myanmar's inclusion might cause them to go slow.

Another source said despite objections from some member countries, Asean would eventually admit Myanmar.

The confidence is based on the communique of the Asean Foreign Ministers meeting in Jakarta which reiterated their continued determination to enhance cooperation with Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar and assist them in preparing for their eventual membership in Asean.

-- BERNAMA

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