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Myanmar has right to join Asean: Mahathir

Kamarul Yunus in Budapest

BUDAPEST (Hungary) Tues: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says Myanmar has the right to join the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) and hopes its admission would enable it to understand how other governments manage their countries.

Speaking at a joint press conference after meeting Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Horn here yesterday, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia adopts a different approach in tackling issues concerning Myanmar.

"We have a different philosophy ... I don't believe in immediately applying sanctions or trying to force people to behave themselves.

"It is not for us to teach people how to run their countries ... We feel the best way is by having relations and by showing them that there are other ways of doing things," he added.

He said the idea by some countries that sanctions would force the people of Myanmar to toe their line "is not something that Malaysia agrees (to) or would like to impose on Myanmar or any other countries".

"We think Myanmar has the right to join Asean and when they join the group, they will understand that there are other ways of running a country," he said, adding that he believes Myanmar would be able to contribute to Asean.

The US recently imposed economic sanctions and barred new American investments in Myanmar to force the junta to submit to so-called pro-democracy movement in the country. The European Union has imposed sanctions that bar members of the military regime in Myanmar from travelling to Europe.

Asean was seen to have defied the wish for sanctions by the West when its foreign ministers last month decided to admit Myanmar, together with Laos and Cambodia, into the grouping.

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