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Myanmar will be an Asean member: Dr M

Kamarul Yunus

MALAYSIA foresees no problem in the admission of Myanmar, together with Cambodia and Laos, into Asean, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"Unless something unusual happens, I feel Myanmar would be admitted because (Asean members) have made a commitment in Jakarta recently that we will admit all three countries together.

"If we do not want to admit Myanmar, we cannot admit Cambodia and Laos. That will be unfair to them," he told reporters after chairing a two-hour dialogue with ministers, deputy ministers, chief ministers, government officials and corporate leaders at the National Congress on Vision 2020 in Petaling Jaya yesterday.

Asked what he meant by "unusual", Dr Mahathir said: "Perhaps if the Myanmar Government slaughtered five million people in that country, then we might change our mind."

The Prime Minister was asked whether Asean would still want Myanmar in the grouping in view of the pressure asserted by the US, which already imposed sanctions on Myanmar.

Dr Mahathir said Asean can withstand whatever pressure that may be asserted by countries like the US because the group is now more independent and can make its own decisions.

"There will be problems. But we have to remember that the business community in America also does not agree to the Government's sanction (on Myanmar) ... they do not agree with the Government.

"The Government may come and may go but business people are much more permanent. They have been around for more than 100 years," he added.

Asked whether Asean and other countries should accept Myanmar into the grouping although there are internal problems in Myanmar, Dr Mahathir said: "Yes, they should because that is the best thing that can happen if we are really keen on seeing Myanmar make progress and its people enjoy good life, more freedom."

The Asean Foreign Ministers are scheduled to meet in Kuala Lumpur on May 31 to discuss the admission of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar into the grouping which now comprises Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The three countries are expected to be admitted late this year, when Asean holds its 30th anniversary, fulfilling the group's long-held ambition of incorporating the 10 nations of South-East Asia.

AFP reports: The Myanmar Government has expressed its "sincere appreciation" for the "support and understanding" of Asean in planning to admit Burma to the regional group, the official press said in Yangon Tuesday.

Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw made the comments at a meeting of Burmese and Asean officials, a week after the US imposed an investment ban on Burma and appealed to the regional grouping to bar Myanmar's admittance.

"We are indebted to the Asean secretariat, as well as to our Asean friends" for their support, Ohn Gyaw said, adding Tuesday's consultative meeting served to provide a vital link between Myanmar and the Asean countries.

"It illustrates the kind encouragement on the part of our Asean friends, as well as our sincere commitment regarding Myanmar's membership," Ohn Gya was quoted as saying in the New Light of Myanmar.

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