

04 MAR 1998

Britain-Asean

EUROPE WON'T TIE ASIAN AID TO MYANMAR'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

KUALA LUMPUR, March 4 (Bernama) -- Britain today assured Asean member countries they will not be forced to pressure Myanmar over Yangon's alleged human rights abuses in return for Europe's help for Asian economic recovery.

"There is no leverage or linkage between the two," said British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Derek Fatchett.

"The answer is no," he said when asked by reporters if Europe would use its assistance to the Asian region to pressure Asean countries to act against Myanmar over its alleged human rights abuses.

Speaking at a news conference prior to meeting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, he said Britain and Europe have already stated their position on Myanmar's human rights record.

Fatchett said earlier in a statement read out at the news conference that it was in Europe's interest to help Asian countries deal with their financial difficulties because "they are our problems too."

Fatchett is on a one-day visit here as personal emissary of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and special representative of the European Union presidency.

Reports from Bangkok yesterday quoted Amnesty International as calling on European countries to use their "influence" and make human rights abuses in Myanmar a central issue at the Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) in London next month.

The news reports said a report prepared for the meeting recommends that European and Asian nations use Asem to toughen the international community's stance against Yangon.

The report maintains that human rights abuses in Myanmar are a "complicating factor" in relations between Europe and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), which accepted Myanmar as a full member last July.

Asean maintains a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member countries.

Asean groups Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. -- BERNAMA

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