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PM tells Myanmar: Consider adopting standard practices of the world

Zainon Ahmad in Yangon

MALAYSIA has advised Myanmar leaders that in the best interest of their country, they should consider adopting certain standard practices or values that have been accepted by the international community.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is on a two-day visit to Myanmar said while it was the right of the government in power to administer the country, it could not ignore international standards in "certain matters".

A country which is a member of the international community could not be cocooned against other people's opinions and criticisms, he told Myanmar leaders during their meetings with him and his delegation on Monday.

Shortly after his arrival to a red-carpet welcome and a 19-gun salute, he met with the chairman of the ruling State Peace and Development Council, Gen Than Shwe, who is also Prime Minister, and SPDC secretary Lt-Gen Khim Nyunt at the Sein Le Kantha State Guesthouse.

Later Dr Mahathir and his delegation, which included Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, met Myanmar government officials at the house of Parliament.

Abdullah, who briefed Malaysian journalists after the meeting, said the meeting also discussed Myanmar's new constitution being drafted by the National Convention set up in 1990.

He said Dr Mahathir asked whether the drafting could be speeded up even though he understood that the NC had come up against problems which could not be easily resolved.

The Malaysians were told that these problems had to do with the various ethnic groups that were vehemently against integrating into the mainstream Myanmar society.

Dr Mahathir told the Myanmar officials the Malaysian experience of race relations emphasised on tolerance in resolving racial or ethnic issues.

He said tolerance should also be observed when dealing with religions of others.

When asked whether the question of Rohingyas who are Muslims of Myanmar fleeing the country was raised, Abdullah said Malaysia had mentioned that some illegal immigrants in Malaysia had claimed they were from Myanmar.

Dr Mahathir suggested that the Myanmar ambassador in Kuala Lumpur make efforts to verify their status, and if they were confirmed to be from Myanmar, then the country should take them back.

Gen Than Shwe agreed to the suggestion and said some senior officials would be sent to Malaysia to help their embassy in this matter. The two sides also discussed the currency issues and the economic problems besetting the region.

Myanmar agreed with Malaysia's suggestion of using local currencies in regional trade. It also agreed that the use of barter trade was acceptable.

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