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Mahathir: Pakistan coup is regrettable

Ariff Awang

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed regret over the military coup in Pakistan on Tuesday, Bernama reports.

He said the military should be a professional body following the orders of the Government of the day which was elected by the people.

"To me, that incident is very regrettable," he told reporters after meeting a delegation of the Malaysian British Business Council led by co-chairmen Mirzan Mahathir and Sir Patrick Gillam, who is Standard Chartered chairman, in Putrajaya yesterday.

Reports from Islamabad quoted the man behind the bloodless coup, army chief General Pervez Musharraf, as saying he seized power "to save the country from ruin" and would announce his policies soon.

Musharraf did not give details on the military's plans for Pakistan and did not say what he would do with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the man he ejected from power.

Dr Mahathir said if the military is inclined towards politics it will be quite difficult for a country to progress with a smooth administration.

Whatever faults Sharif might have, "he was still elected by the people", he added.

"Everyone must respect leaders who are elected by the people.

"If there are people who disagree with Nawaz Sharif, they should wait until the election is held," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that during an election they could use all the facilities of a democracy to elect a good leader. "But taking over power by force is something inappropriate."

Asked whether Malaysia will recognise the Pakistani administration following the coup, Dr Mahathir said: "We have to wait until we find out the actual position of this Government in terms of its acceptance by the people of Pakistan."

Asked on the position of Malaysian High Commission staff in Islamabad, Dr Mahathir said there have been no reports to indicate the security situation in Pakistan is worrying.

"So they will stay put there," he said.

The Prime Minister also said the issue may be raised at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Durban, South Africa, early next month.

"Normally, CHOGM will decide whether they recognise (the Government) or not, and we will be guided by the CHOGM decision," he said.

ARIFF AWANG reports: Malaysia considers the coup in Pakistan as an internal affair and it is confident that the situation will be resolved very quickly.

"Whoever takes over the Government is not for us to decide. It is up the Pakistanis themselves," Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Malaysia's relations with Pakistan have always been good and will be maintained, he added.

The important thing, Syed Hamid said, is for the country's security situation to be brought under control. Malaysia wants to see peace and stability in Pakistan so that the prosperity of its people can be assured.

Kuala Lumpur is monitoring the latest developments closely and so far there are no reports of Malaysians being hurt or in danger in Pakistan.

"I was informed that the situation is quite calm."

As such, there are no immediate plans to get Malaysians out of Pakistan and there has also been no request from Malaysians to be brought home, he said.

Musharraf announced on Tuesday that Sharif's Government had been dismissed. This followed the taking over of government television and radio stations throughout the country by the army.

Hours earlier, Sharif had said the army chief of staff, then on a visit to Sri Lanka, had been sacked.

The Pakistani Prime Minister appears to have been placed under house arrest.

There was no immediate explanation on Sharif's decision to sack Musharraf, but in recent weeks there had been reports of a rift between the army and the Government. Musharraf's term as army chief was to end in April 2000.

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