

# PM arrives in Myanmar amid push for dialogue

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YANGON, Wed. — Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad arrived here today amid an international push for Myanmar's ruling generals to launch an historic dialogue with the opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

Efforts to achieve reconciliation in the military-run country have been spearheaded by Malaysian diplomat Razali Ismail who was appointed UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special envoy to Myanmar last April. Razali is due to arrive in the capital Yangon on Friday for his third mission to Myanmar since taking up the post.

The visits by the two Malaysians, while not officially linked, has raised suggestions that they are part of broader international efforts to break the decade-long political stalemate in Myanmar.

In an editorial today, *The Nation* daily in Bangkok expressed hope that Malaysia, a "loyal friend" to Myanmar over the past few years, could play a key role in breaking the impasse.

"Dr Mahathir can prove that he can make a difference in Myanmar, or at least encourage the junta to adopt economic reforms and engage the outside world," it said.

"It is payback time for the junta leaders,"

after Malaysia sponsored Myanmar's entry into Asean in 1997, it said.

"It is not known just how far he would go to urge the junta to jump-start a political dialogue with the opposition ... but this effort is at the top of Razali's agenda."

Dr Mahathir last visited Myanmar in March 1998, accompanied by his Foreign Minister who was permitted to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi.

This time his delegation includes Foreign Ministry secretary-general Abdul Kadir Mohamed, but there are no plans for him to see the Nobel peace laureate who has been under house arrest since September.

Dr Mahathir is to meet with senior General Than Shwe, the chairman of the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), today for talks.

Than Shwe, number one in the junta, greeted Dr Mahathir on his arrival at Yangon's airport, sources in the capital said.

Tomorrow, Dr Mahathir is to travel to the Myanmar-Thai border to visit joint venture projects. — AFP

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