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Mahathir-Myanmar

ELECTIONS CAN HELP MYANMAR TO RESOLVE NATIONAL CONFLICT, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has suggested that Myanmar hold a general election in a few years for national reconciliation.

The prime minister said he stated this to Myanmar's ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Chairman, Senior General Than Shwe during his visit to Yangon on Jan 3 and 4.

"He (Than Shwe) is willing to do the elections eventually. Well, the election will not be held this year or next. It should be held in a few years," said Dr Mahathir in a Mainichi Daily News report, published today.

The prime minister gave an interview to the Mainichi's Hong Kong bureau chief Akiko Kato during his working visit to Japan recently. The transcript of the interview was also made available to Bernama.

In the interview, Dr Mahathir was also asked whether Asean is changing its non-interference policy when recommending that Myanmar should hold a general election.

Dr Mahathir said: "No. It is because Myanmar is a special case. The West is trying to pressure Myanmar, pressure Asean".

He said Asean member countries do not want to interfere in any internal affairs of the countries but to foster democracy in Myanmar.

"We feel that the benefit of a kind of liberal democracy in Asean member countries should be exposed and made known to the people and government of Myanmar, so they will not reject the system because this system is good and ensure the country can have the government of its choice," said Dr Mahathir.

The prime minister also explained that the purpose of his visit to Myanmar was to obtain first-hand information on the situation in the country.

He said there was no doubt that the present Myanmar government was trying to improve the living condition of the people.

Asked how he sees the conflict between the National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and the present government, Dr Mahathir said it was something that could not be solved by confrontation.

"What is needed is to put the interest of Myanmar above party interests. And I think the government is willing to discuss with Aung San Suu Kyi to find and to do something to find solutions for Myanmar," he said.

The prime minister, who was also asked whether he would be the mediator of both sides, said Malaysia had been appointed by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to try to resolve the conflict and it was best to leave it to the UN.

Tan Sri Razali Ismail, the former Malaysian Permanent Representative to the UN, is now the UN special envoy to Myanmar.

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