

Myanmar may have to go: Dr M

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PUTRAJAYA: He was one of the few leaders who lobbied for Myanmar's entry into Asean. Now, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has warned the military-led country that it faces expulsion from the grouping if it continues to defy world pressure to release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Mahathir, who played a major role in bringing Myanmar into the 10-member Asean in 1997, made it clear, however, that expulsion would only be considered as a last resort.

"We will have to examine every avenue before we can take such drastic actions," he told AFP in an exclusive interview.

"In the end, it may have to be that way I

don't say that it cannot be but certainly not at this moment."

Aung San Suu Kyi was detained on May 30 when her convoy was attacked by a junta-backed mob while she was on a political tour of northern Myanmar.

The incident triggered a wider crackdown on her National League for Democracy, that has resulted in its entire leadership being thrown into jail or put under house arrest.

Although the junta has insisted that Suu Kyi is being detained on a temporary basis for her own safety, it has not indicated when she could be released, despite pressure from the United Nations and countries around the

world.

"We have already informed them that we are very disappointed with the turn of events and we hope that Aung San Suu Kyi will be released as soon as possible," Mahathir said.

"They sent an envoy to see me and I told them that is our view. We are very disappointed over these things and, of course, we have done our very best to try and get them to change their minds. But if they are willing to defy the world, then what can Malaysia do?"

The Myanmar issue has already shaken up Asean, which has been criticised in the past for its policy of not interfering in the internal affairs of member states.

However, Mahathir said: "We don't criticise member states unless what one state does embarrasses us . . . causes a problem for us."

"We are thinking about ourselves as Asean. We are not criticising Myanmar for doing what is not related to us, but what they have done has affected us, our credibility