

Intervention: When it is acceptable

NSF 25 JUL 2003

SINGAPORE, Thurs. — Asean countries have been advised not to intervene in the domestic crisis affecting member nations unless requested by their Governments or the situation might escalate into a regional threat.

Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Mohd Shafie Apdal said although non-intervention was still the backbone of Asean's policies, protecting the region's stability was of greater importance.

He said Asean countries unable to stamp out their internal conflicts which could affect the entire region should consider allowing mediation by their neighbours to reach a definite solution.

He cited economic sanctions and even expulsion from the grouping as some of the ways Asean members could pressure their neighbours to resolve their internal issues, but reiterated that such drastic measures should be taken as a last resort.

"All along, non-intervention has been a fruitful arrangement within the Asean grouping, but this arrangement could be augmented by the fact that members are transparent about their internal problems.

"We prefer refraining from mediating in a member country's domestic affairs but if they should pose a threat to the region, then that threat must be removed," he said after delivering his keynote address at a one-day forum on **Regional Strategic and Political Developments** at a hotel, here.

Earlier, Shafie said almost all countries within the Asean grouping were plagued with internal problems which ranged from separatist rebellion to religious extremism.

"Internal problems deplete a nation's resources that could instead be used for national development, apart from driving away foreign investments and corroding bilateral relations."

Shafie named Myanmar and the Philippines as among the countries which could use an external political hand in solving their respective internal disputes during a question-and-answer session.

"On Myanmar, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's suggestion that the country might be expelled from Asean is only after all other means have been exhausted, including mediation by third parties."