

PM: Myanmar needs time for reconciliation

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BALI: Asean leaders will not give a strong statement on the situation in Myanmar because it is not the grouping's way to resolve problems.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, noting that Myanmar had made progress in its reconciliation process and formulating a roadmap, said it should be given time.

"At least there is progress, we have to admit there is some progress and we should appreciate it. All progress must happen step by step and you can't just change overnight.

"I don't think it is the way of Asean. Our way is you have a constructive approach and not be confrontational," he said after meeting Myanmar Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir is here to attend the ninth Asean summit and a summit with dialogue partners Japan, South Korea and China.

Dr Mahathir said Khin Nyunt had explained the progress in Myanmar and the implementation of the roadmap.

"I gave Malaysia's view. Malaysia is a good friend of Myanmar and we will try our best to be helpful towards Myanmar."

On the release of opposition leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi who is under house arrest, Dr Mahathir said he had mentioned the matter to Khin Nyunt but felt it was a decision to be made by Yangon.

Asked who would lead Asean after he steps down as Malaysia's Prime Minister, he said Asean was a collective leadership and no single person had done more than others.

"No one person from a country can lead a group, it must be everybody. We can give our views, it can be useful, I have no worries about Asean," he said.

On Israeli forces attacking a training camp for Palestinian militants in Syria, Dr Mahathir said: "Israel is only making things more difficult. Only the

United States can stop Israel but Israel is defying the United States."

Earlier, addressing the Asean Business and Investment Summit, Dr Mahathir said the Government believed in having good relations with the private sector to enhance its progress.

"We must be business-friendly and listen to the views of the private sector. I keep on telling bureaucrats that their salary is paid by the private sector which pays taxes to the Government."

He also said accusations of cronyism had been made against the Malaysian Government.

"Who is a crony? Anybody who succeeds is labelled as a crony. The number of friends who failed were never mentioned.

"Those who succeed because of their own ability, the Government should help as they are likely to make money.

"We want them to be successful so that they can make a lot of profit and pay taxes to the Government," he added.