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Mahathir-Myanmar

ASEAN WILL NOT USE SANCTIONS AGAINST MYANMAR, SAYS DR M

From Openg Onn and Salbiah Said

NUSA DUA (Bali), Oct 9 (Bernama) -- ASEAN will not impose sanctions against Myanmar over the house arrest imposed by its military government on pro-Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We don't believe in applying sanctions against a country which refuses or has not been able to be democratic. If you apply sanctions, you are punishing people and depriving them of medicine and so forth," he told a media conference at the end of his visit to Bali to attend the ninth ASEAN Summit.

Such action was a cruel way of trying to spread an ideology which was supposed to be good, he said, adding that if democracy was so good, then it should not use such methods, like dropping atom bombs.

"The only country that has dropped atom bombs happens to be a democracy. And I don't appreciate that," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked whether he had any regrets in being the prime mover in admitting Myanmar into the regional grouping, he said "no regrets."

He said the people of Myanmar went through periods of difficulty and they had to react to it.

"We have to be patient with them," he said.

Responding to another question on Myanmar, he said ASEAN would like to see Myanmar become democratic and that the grouping understood the problems faced by the country.

"It is not just one person who may be opposing or are against the government of Myanmar today.

"They have about 100 ethnic groups who are armed, they have guns and rockets. They used to fight against the Myanmar government but today there is some reconciliation but they retain their weapons," he said.

ASEAN, he said, would like to see Myanmar progress towards democracy as a roadmap had been drawn.

"Perhaps the timing will need to be adjusted and progress further. We don't think that we should apply pressure on Myanmar which would actually victimise the people of Myanmar rather than the government. It will do no good at all," he said.

The Prime Minister was also asked on a kidnapping incident where 10 people were being abducted by a group of unknown assailants, at the Borneo Paradise Eco Farm Resort in Kunak, last Sunday. The resort is about three hours' flight from Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur.

He said the incident was regrettable as it only meant that Malaysia had to tighten its security as well as increasing closer cooperation with neighbouring countries.

"We don't like these activities because people do not know actually how big is South East Asia and they think if anything happens in one particular spot in the region, the whole of South East Asia has become an unsafe place. That is why we regret this occurrence. We will take measures to stop a repeat of this kind of activity," he said.

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