

22 JUL 2003

Asem-Myanmar

ASEM FOREIGN MINISTERS NOT TO BE SIDETRACKED BY MYANMAR ISSUE

By: Openg Onn

NUSA DUA (Bali), July 22 (Bernama) -- The foreign ministers meeting (FMM) of the Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) here will not be sidetracked by the issue of the detention of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi despite the wishes of some European countries for it to be discussed, senior officials said today.

Director-General of the Indonesian Intra-Regional Cooperation (America-Europe), Retno Marsudi said that though the issue had not been discussed at the senior officials meeting (SOM), officials had agreed that it would not come up later as a separate agenda.

"There has been a consensus that the Myanmar issue on Suu Kyi will not be entertained as a separate agenda. We have agreed that this is not a conference on Myanmar and more so Suu Kyi," she said when met by reporters on the sideline of the SOM today ahead of the Asem-FMM.

She anticipated that the issue might be brought up in the SOM plenary session today and tomorrow and subsequently during the Asem-FMM by interested partners.

It would not be a problem as Asem was a free willing grouping and it would be left to the floor to bring up such discussion, she said, emphasising that it would not however be treated as a stand alone issue.

Retno said that the coming Asem FMM would give priority on the enlargement of Asem to include three more Asian countries -- Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.

At present, 10 Asian countries are in the list of Asem -- Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Japan and South Korea.

Europe has 15 representatives, namely Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, as well as the Commissioner of the European Union (EU).

Europe has expressed its objection on the inclusion of Myanmar under the enlargement proposal agreed by the Asem informal summit in Singapore in 2001.

"Our priority now is on the enlargement proposal and must be carried out under one package as the trio have applied at the same time as Asem new partners," she said.

The meeting cropped up just days after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad remarked that Myanmar may be expelled from the 10-member Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) if the country refuses to free Suu Kyi.

Malaysian senior officials' chief of delegation, Datuk Hsu King Bee, who is also Deputy Secretary-General II of the Foreign Ministry, when asked on the subject said that Asia was not willing if the Suu Kyi issue is included in the agenda.

"This meeting is about the Asian cooperation with Europe. That is their view (for the detention of Suu Kyi issue to be discussed) but we do not want," she said.

The Malaysian delegation to the Asem-FMM will be headed by Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar who will arrive here tomorrow.

The meeting will centre on a series of international issues including post-war Iraq, the situation in the Korean peninsula, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the recent outbreak of the Severe Acute

Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Also high on the agenda will be establishing counter-terrorism alliances between the two continents.

-- BERNAMA

OPP AHH RM