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Mahathir-Myanmar

DR MAHATHIR EXPRESSES VIEWS ON SUU KYI TO MYANMAR COUNTERPART

By: Salbiah Said and Openg Onn

NUSA DUA (Bali) Oct 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he had expressed Malaysia's view on the issue of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest, to his counterpart, General Khin Nyunt.

He said Khin Nyunt explained to him what was happening in Myanmar and the Road To Democracy And Reconciliation plan that the military-led country had started to implement.

"Malaysia is a good friend of Myanmar and we will try our best to be helpful towards Myanmar," he told Malaysian journalists after meeting the general who called on him at the hotel where they are staying for the two-day ASEAN+3 (China, South Korea and Japan) Summit which begins tomorrow.

Asean secretary-general Ong Keng Yong also paid a courtesy call on Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir caused a stir sometime ago when he said that Myanmar, part of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) should leave the regional grouping if it refused to release Suu Kyi who was arrested on May 30 after a stand-off between her and government supporters.

Suu Kyi was released recently following a medical operation but the government still keeps her under house arrest.

The arrest of Suu Kyi had caused international outrage and the issue had been a torn in the side of Asean with some member nations and dialogue partners expected to bring up the matter during their meeting on this popular Indonesian resort island.

Asked whether he was happy with Myanmar's explanation, Dr Mahathir, who arrived here today, said that at least there was progress.

"We have to admit that there is some progress. I think we should show our appreciation. Of course all progress must be made step by step, (there) cannot be overnight change," he said.

He said it was for Myanmar to make the decision for the release of Suu Kyi now that Asean had given its views.

Asked if Asean would issue a strong statement against Myanmar, he said that it was not the way Asean worked as the regional body engaged in a constructive, not confrontative, approach.

Dr Mahathir, often dubbed the Voice of Asia, was also asked what kind of leadership he expected of the 36-year-old organisation, now that he is retiring as Malaysia's prime minister end of this month.

He responded humbly by saying that Asean practised a collective leadership and that all the leaders of Asean provided the leadership.

"No single person does more or less than the other. We work together. It is a kind of almost like a federation, though it cannot be called that but it's a grouping of countries which are independent. No one country can lead a group.

"Of course we can give our views. Maybe it is useful, maybe not. I have no worry about Asean," he said.

On his plan upon retirement, Dr Mahathir said he wanted to rest and have a nice holiday.

"Sometimes if I'm invited to talk, like just now, I'll talk. That's all I am good for," he said with a chuckle.

He was referring to an unscheduled talk he had made at the insistence of the delegates to the first Asean Business and Investment seminar which

is being held at the hotel in conjunction with the summit.

-- BERNAMA

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