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Mahathir-Myanmar

MYANMAR SHOWS SENSITIVITY BY FORGOING ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 28 (Bernama) -- Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Myanmar's decision to forgo its chairmanship of Asean next year showed that it was sensitive to the thinking of the other member countries of the grouping.

Myanmar on Tuesday declared that it would forgo the chair of Asean when its turn comes up in one year's time.

The move was to avert potential diplomatic embarrassment for the 10-member grouping, following signals by the West that cordial relations with the grouping would be jeopardised by Myanmar's chairmanship due next year.

The Asean chairmanship term is held by its member countries in alphabetical order.

The opposition to Myanmar has been due to allegations that its military government had committed human rights abuses against its own people and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, against the principles of democracy.

"Unfortunately for Aung San Suu Kyi, she will have to put up with this for a long time but change has to be slow if it is not going to be too disruptive," said Dr Mahathir.

"I don't believe democracy is a perfect system. It does not solve all problems," he said at the luncheon talk entitled "Malaysia in Asia-Challenges, Responses and Opportunities" at the third Asia Economic Summit, here.

"We need to persuade Myanmar maybe to adopt gradually a greater degree of democracy," said Dr Mahathir.

However, he stressed that it would be difficult to persuade the Myanmar government to adopt democracy for fear of a backlash given that historically, a number of dictators in the past who had allowed democracy ended up being thrown into jail or sentenced to death.

Dr Mahathir said that in efforts to persuade the Myanmar government to accept democracy, he had even brought them to Malaysia to see that democracy would not hurt a leader.

-- BERNAMA

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