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PM: Asean in a quandary over Suu Kyi's continued detention

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PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - Saying that Asean was in a quandary due to the arrest and continued detention of Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on the Myanmar Government to consider the views of fellow Asean members.

"I hope she is released as soon as possible. I don't know why she has not been released yet. I hope that the Government of Myanmar takes into consideration the views expressed by other countries, especially its fellow Asean members as this (the detention of Suu Kyi) has put Asean in a quandary," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the Myanmar Government's reluctance in releasing Suu Kyi during a Press conference at his office today.

Myanmar's military Government had placed the Opposition leader under "protective custody" since May 30 after violent clashes between her supporters and pro-Government groups.

She is believed to be held in a Government "safe-house" near Yangon, but Western wire-reports suggest that Suu Kyi is being held in the Insein jail which has been described as being in a deplorable state.

United Nations special envoy from Malaysia, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, is the only outsider who has managed to persuade the military leadership for a brief meeting with Suu Kyi since her arrest.

Razali was also instrumental in persuading the junta to free Suu Kyi from her last period of house arrest in May 2002.

The career diplomat had told the media last week that Suu Kyi was not injured and that she would be released as soon as possible, but to-date the Government is yet to free her.

The latest attempt to secure her freedom was undertaken by Japanese Deputy Foreign Minister, Tetsuro Yano, who met Myanmar's military intelligence chief Khin Nyunt, third in command in the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) yesterday.

It was widely speculated last week that Japan might scale down its aid to Myanmar due to the latest saga but Yano's remarks, published today, were toned down.

"The purpose of my visit was not to deliver a review of the Japanese position toward Myanmar, but I was hoping to break the stalemate," he told the media after his meeting with the military leader.

Japan is the main aid donor to Myanmar.

Meanwhile, a Reuters report stated that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in a statement issued by his office in New York, said he learned she was held in Insein jail outside Yangon and considered "the conditions under which she is being held to be truly deplorable".

He said that Razali informed him Suu Kyi was being detained under a law protecting the state against subversive elements.

The Myanmar junta has repeatedly said that it was holding Suu Kyi for her own personal safety.