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Malaysia pledges to help Myanmar in its democracy efforts

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has assured Myanmar that Malaysia will do its utmost to assist the country in its democracy efforts.

The Prime Minister, in Bali to attend the two-day Ninth Asean Summit which begins today, said that although Malaysia had given its views on Aung San Suu Kyi who was under house arrest in Yangon, only the Myanmar Government could decide when she should be released.

Dr Mahathir had earlier held a 30-minute meeting with Myanmar Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, who explained the situation in Myanmar and the road map to democracy it had begun to implement.

"I merely gave Malaysia's views that we would do whatever we could to help Myanmar (in its democratisation process)," Dr Mahathir said.

Suu Kyi's arrest on May 30 had alarmed all Asean leaders.

It prompted Dr Mahathir to warn Myanmar that it faced expulsion from Asean if it did not take into consideration the opinion of other countries in the region.

Asked today whether he was happy with the developments in Myanmar - Suu Kyi, earlier held in a government "rest house" is now under house arrest in her lakeside home - Dr Mahathir said:

"I think we have to admit that there has been some progress and I think we should show some appreciation.

"Progress can only be made step by step. We cannot expect it to happen overnight," Dr Mahathir added.

On whether he had specifically discussed Suu Kyi's release, he said: "Well, I mentioned something about it." He did not elaborate.

On whether Asean leaders would come up with a strong statement over Myanmar's treatment of Suu Kyi at the end of their summit, Dr Mahathir said this was not the Asean way in dealing with issues. "The Asean way is to take a constructive approach, not a confrontational one."

He was also asked whether Asean would be affected when he retired on Oct 31 as he had provided the grouping with strong leadership.

"Asean has always had collective leadership. All the leaders of Asean provide the leadership. There is no single person who has done more or less than others. We work together.

"It is a grouping of independent countries. No one person from one country can lead a group. I have no worries about Asean."