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PM: Not constructive to impose sanctions on Myanmar

PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that it would not be constructive to merely apply pressure or impose sanctions on Myanmar over the detention of Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"It's not very constructive if we keep on pressing people. Whenever they comply with something, there is no reward, (but) if they do something else then more pressure is applied," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the launch of a book on Umno's founding father Dato Onn Ja'afar.

He was asked if constructive engagement with the military junta was still the best option in dealing with the matter.

Although Asean adopts the non-intervention principle in a member country's internal affairs policy, the detention of Suu Kyi is expected to be discussed during the upcoming Asean ministerial meeting in Cambodia next week.

It is widely expected then that the United States, which is a party to the Asean Regional Forum to be held in conjunction with the Ministerial Meeting, would pressure Asean into taking a more stringent approach against Myanmar.

In his most recent statement on the matter, US Secretary of State Colin Powell had indicated that he would seek action from fellow Asean members to pressure Myanmar into releasing the Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Myanmar's military rulers took Suu Kyi into "protective custody" during a trip to the north of the country on May 30 after a violent riot involving her supporters.

Powell dismissed the explanation from Myanmar's rulers of the incident in which Suu Kyi was taken back into custody, saying investigations by US embassy staff showed members of the military government had directed and staged the riot.

The US Senate meanwhile has voted 97-1 yesterday to approve a Bill to ban all imports from the Southeast Asian nation in response to Suu Kyi's detention.

The Senate Bill would ban imports of anything mined, made, grown or assembled in Myanmar. It would freeze Myanmar Government assets held in the United States, bar former and present leaders from travelling to the United States, and require the Treasury Department to oppose World Bank or International Monetary Fund loans.

Suu Kyi and about two dozen senior members of her National League for Democracy have been held at locations in or outside the Myanmar capital.

On Tuesday Myanmar's ruling junta had assured visiting United Nations special envoy Tan Sri Razali Ismail that Suu Kyi would be released as soon as possible.

Razali, who managed to meet the Opposition leader in custody, said she was in good health and was not injured in the riots.

"I have been given clear assurances by both Secretary One and Maung Aye that they will lift the protective custody on her as soon as possible," Razali told the media after his meeting with Suu Kyi.

Secretary One is military intelligence chief Khin Nyunt and Maung Aye is the army commander.