

17/06/2003

No indication Asean is shifting from non-interference policy

Roziana Hamsawi

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Asean's discussion of the detention of Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi by the ruling military junta does not indicate that Asean is reviewing its policy of non-interference in a member's affairs.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today the discussion had more to do with "Asean's policy of constructive engagement".

"I have not heard of Asean wanting to do away with the non-interference (policy) but certainly Asean wants to engage Myanmar constructively to overcome problems in the country," he said.

Abdullah was asked whether the discussion of Myanmar's situation at the 36th Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Cambodia signalled a change in Asean's policy of non-interference.

According to Press reports, AMM, which began today, was expected to discuss the problem after speculation that the United States was pressuring Asean into taking a more stringent approach towards Myanmar.

A majority of Asean ministers were reportedly in favour of the release of Suu Kyi from "protective custody" by the junta.

At a Press conference after opening the 8th Annual Asia Oil and Gas Conference on behalf of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah said Asean was hopeful such a discussion would allow Myanmar an avenue to gain confidence and trust.