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Shamed by association

MYANMAR'S reluctance to heed world opinion and the earnest advice of its friends in Asean on the continued detention of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is perplexing, given the looming threat of sanctions. Are the leaders of the military regime willing to risk complete isolation?

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's warning to the ruling junta of expulsion if it persists in its recalcitrance is a fair indication of the dire consequences awaiting it. The Prime Minister's statement on Sunday assumes greater importance, as it comes from an ally who walked the proverbial extra mile to bring Myanmar into Asean in 1997. The time may soon come for Asean to flex its muscles and prevent a member from becoming an embarrassment to the grouping.

Myanmar must recognise that it cannot renege on the commitment made six years ago to ensure that domestic policies would not affect the credibility of the larger forum that it joined. It was on this premise that Malaysia convinced fellow members to admit the regime into Asean in the face of strong opposition from Western countries.

Asean should not vacillate on punitive action if Myanmar refuses to desist from the campaign of repression against legitimate opposition. Its credibility will be jeopardised if it tolerates the increasingly illogical actions of a regime refusing to accept reality.

It is apparent that the junta cannot come to terms with the fact that its days may be numbered. It may have to learn the hard way that nations in the 21st century face ostracism to the detriment of their people if they refuse to adhere to the norms of civilised society.