

M'sia urges junta to free Aung San Suu Kyi
Malaysiakini.com
May 7, 2007

The government has urged Burma to free democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, three weeks before her latest term of house arrest comes up for review.

Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar told AFP the military regime should release the 61-year-old Nobel Peace Prize in the interests of national reconciliation.

"Our position has not changed. They (military junta) should not continue with her detention," he said.

"We think since they are continuing with the process of political reconciliation, it is better that they release her rather than to continue holding her."

Aung San Suu Kyi's latest term of house arrest is up for review on May 27.

Meanwhile, Southeast Asian lawmakers described her continuing detention as "very cruel" and urged the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to suspend trade and economic ties with fellow member Burma, now known as Myanmar.

"The punishment imposed is very cruel. It is about time the military regime shows some consideration for her welfare," Zaid Ibrahim, chairman of the Asean Inter-parliamentary Myanmar Caucus, told AFP.

"I hope the military junta will adhere to the views of Asean," he added.

Lawmakers from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand are members of the caucus formed in 2004 to push for democratic reforms in Burma.

Helpless Asean

Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest at her lakeside home in Yangon for most of the past 17 years.

Her latest period in detention began after a May 2003 attack on her convoy by a junta-backed militia in the country's central region.

She was thrown into prison after the assault but, following an operation four months later, was allowed to return home - again under house arrest.

Calling for the Nobel peace laureate's immediate release, Zaid said it was clear that the governments of Southeast Asia were unable to secure her freedom.

"Obviously, Asean is quite helpless. It seems to me that their appeals are ignored by the junta," he said.

Zaid urged Asean, especially members with close economic ties with Burma, to press its military leaders to listen to their appeals.

"Perhaps they should be more assertive. There are a number of things they can do. One example is they have a lot of business relations with Myanmar. Can't Asean say we will suspend or slow down the ties?" he said.

Malaysia, a leading investor in the resource-rich country, had previously signalled the region was frustrated with Burma, saying the military regime had snubbed efforts to push for democracy.

Common position

Syed Hamid travelled to Rangoon last March as an Asean envoy to check on its claims that it was shifting towards democracy, but he was denied access to Aung San Suu Kyi.

Asked if Malaysia or Asean made any direct appeals recently to Burma to free Aung San Suu Kyi, Syed Hamid said: "We have made our position clear and repeatedly urged Myanmar authorities to free her. This is a common Asean position."

Burma has been ruled by the military since 1962.

The junta has launched a reform road map but critics have dismissed the process as a sham because it does not include Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, which won 1990 elections but was never allowed to rule.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/66874>