

PM: MYANMAR ACCEPTS PROPOSALS

Muhyiddin says outcomes of Asean Leaders' Meeting on Myanmar crisis prove critics wrong

JAKARTA

THE Asean Leaders' Meeting that concluded yesterday has succeeded in addressing the Myanmar crisis.

Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said: "We have succeeded. It's beyond our expectations in getting the outcome from today's (yesterday's) meeting."

Asean constructively engaged with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing of Myanmar, the junta chief, at the meeting held at the Asean Secretariat here yesterday.

In a Bernama report, Muhyiddin said Myanmar accepted all the three proposals put forward by Malaysia in tackling the crisis.

First, to de-escalate the situation on the ground, and stop the killing and violence against civilians.

Second, to release political detainees promptly and unconditionally.

Third, to allow the Asean Chair and Asean secretary-general to have access to Myanmar, including to all the parties concerned.

"Myanmar responded well and did not reject all the three proposals by Malaysia," said Muhyiddin.

The Myanmar crisis took the centre stage at yesterday's meeting. Its military overthrew the civilian government and declared a year-long state of emergency.

The coup triggered mass



Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin attending a special Asean Leaders' Meeting on the crisis in Myanmar at the Asean Secretariat in Jakarta yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

protests, which were met with deadly violence resulting in hundreds of people having been killed since then.

"General Min agreed that violence must stop," said Muhyiddin.

Apart from the three proposals by Malaysia, Muhyiddin said Myanmar also agreed to proposals from other Asean countries, including humanitarian assistance and national reconciliation efforts in settling the crisis.

Muhyiddin said the outcomes of the meeting proved wrong some critics who said the regional grouping did not do anything to address the crisis.

"We are very concerned with the development in Myanmar and we find ways to tackle the crisis," he said, adding that Asean would continue to play its roles to overcome the crisis.

Muhyiddin also held a bilateral meeting with his Vietnamese

counterpart, Pham Minh Chinh, on the sidelines of the meeting at the Asean Secretariat.

Earlier, in a statement released after the meeting, Muhyiddin said the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other members that was upheld by Asean should not be at the expense of ignoring a serious situation compromising peace, security and stability of the bloc and its wider region.

He said although the principle of non-interference was embedded in the Asean charter, it should not be treated as justification for inaction among the 10-member countries over the crisis that is taking place in Myanmar.

"This principle of non-interference is not for us to hide behind, it cannot be a reason for our inaction. The crisis that happens in one Asean member state is not going to solve itself without affecting other member states.

"There is a tremendous expectation on the part of the international community on how Asean is addressing the Myanmar issue. The pressure is increasing, and there is only so much that Asean can do."

Muhyiddin said this in his intervention notes at the in-person Asean leaders' summit here yesterday.

Chaired by Sultan of Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, the special meeting was held to discuss and find a solution to the crisis enveloping Myanmar.

Malaysia's proposal for the Asean Chair and the bloc secretary-general to have access to Myanmar, including to all the parties concerned, was described as a step forward in resolving the crisis following the ongoing protests against the February military coup.

"This is much needed for Asean to provide an honest and unbi-

ased observation. If Asean is allowed access, this can demonstrate to the world that it is on track in helping Myanmar restore normalcy in the country.

"And if Asean can provide regular updates with the full participation of Myanmar, this will demonstrate the willingness of the country to engage constructively and move forward," said Muhyiddin.

Malaysia, he said, had been greatly affected by the instability in Myanmar, not only recently, but for the past few decades.

He said Malaysia currently hosts around 200,000 displaced persons from Myanmar, particularly from the Rakhine State.

"Our resources and capacity are stretched in the management of refugees and asylum seekers, further compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Our detention centres are overcrowded, and the promise from third countries to resettle these displaced persons has not been forthcoming.

"Within Malaysia, they were once accorded sympathy, but the mood on the ground has turned from affinity to anger, with anti-refugee sentiment rapidly building up," he said, adding that a prolonged displacement would make them vulnerable to become victims to human traffickers and terrorist recruiters.

Hence Malaysia, he said, called for a voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons to Myanmar and for all Asean member states to have a collective responsibility in handling displaced persons in this region.

"With the return to normalcy, we wish to see the continuation of the agreed repatriation mechanism reached between Bangladesh and Myanmar."

Additional reporting by Adib Povera