

Abdullah raises thorny issue of Suu Kyi with Khin

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■ By Deborah Loh

debloh@nst.com.my

PUTRAJAYA, Tues. — Malaysia raised the thorny issue of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi with visiting Myanmar Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt today and urged that Asean Governments be kept abreast of her status.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Khin discussed the issues in a restricted meeting.

"Abdullah conveyed the message that while not interfering in Myanmar's domestic affairs, it was important that Malaysia and other Asean members be informed about the status of Suu Kyi's house arrest and why her party, the National League for Democracy was not participating in the country's national convention to draft its constitution.

"Myanmar is a matter of interest to the international community and Malaysia needs to know what is happening there so we feel comfortable when we have to explain the issues to others," Syed Hamid told reporters after sending Khin and his delegation off after their one-day visit.

Asean Governments have in the past not raised issues on Suu Kyi in view of the group's non-interference stand over domestic issues of neighbouring countries.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia's decision to raise the question of Suu Kyi and Khin's explanation showed that the Myanmar leader understood the neighbouring countries' concern over the situation there.

He said Khin explained that the NLD had decided to stay out of the constitutional talks but the Government was not closing its doors to them.

Foreign reports said the NLD boycotted the talks because the Government refused to free Suu Kyi. Syed Hamid said in today's meeting Khin did not bring up the issue of Suu

Kyi's release and had said that the reason for her detention was to enable the drafting of the constitution at the convention to proceed smoothly.

The convention was launched on May 17 and is being attended by more than 1,000 delegates who will decide on a draft constitution. The draft will be put through a national referendum for public approval.

This is expected to be followed by elections where the people will elect representatives to the upper and lower houses.

"Malaysia is interested in seeing that the democratic process comes to Myanmar, so that it is not marginalised by the international community. They are trying to proceed towards democracy so they should be given a chance," Syed Hamid said.

He said while Malaysia felt that the drafting of the constitution should include all parties, including Suu Kyi, Kuala Lumpur did not intend to impose the stand on Myanmar.

Before Khin left Malaysia this afternoon, he held a brief meeting with United Nations Special Envoy to Myanmar Tan Sri Razali Ismail, who said he wanted to return to Myanmar soon to continue mediation.

Earlier, Khin was accorded a state welcome at the Prime Minister's Department. Abdullah then hosted a luncheon for Khin and his delegation, which included several Ministers.

After their restricted meeting, Abdullah and Khin joined their respective government officials for a delegation meeting where they discussed expanding bilateral ties in various areas, including agriculture, fisheries, tourism and information technology.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia was Myanmar's fourth largest investor, with more than US\$600 million (RM2.28 billion) in approved projects there. Some projects had yet to take off due to the Asian financial crisis, and Malaysia would look at putting them back on track.