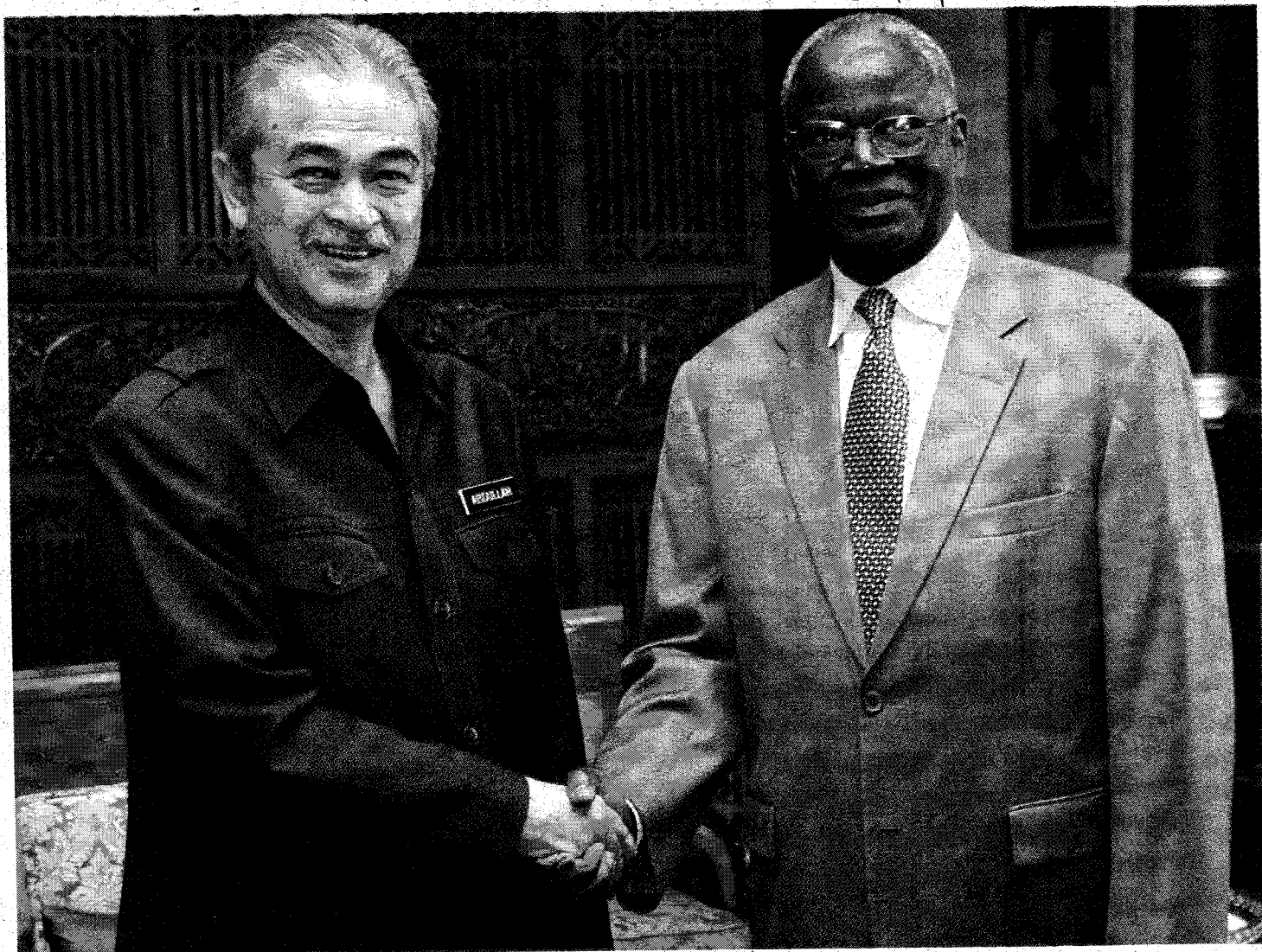


Asean must 'go a step further' on Myanmar

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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi with UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari in Putrajaya yesterday. Gambari is in Malaysia as part of a regional tour to meet Asean leaders and discuss the Myanmar crisis. — AFP picture

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KUALA LUMPUR: Asean and the United Nations must work together to resolve the Myanmar crisis, UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari said.

Gambari, here on a two-day visit to muster regional support for a tougher stand against the Myanmar junta, said he held substantive discussions with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday.

"We are both looking at how Asean can support and complement the role of the secretary-general in this area.

"We appreciate the strong statement coming out of Asean but now is the time to work together for concrete results.

"I carry written special messages from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the leadership of these countries.

"We're hoping and counting on their support and co-operation," he said at Wisma UN.

Gambari said Asean was important as Myanmar was a mem-

ber and also because it involved serious issues neighbouring countries would have to deal with.

"We believe all those who have an interest in peace and stability and the democratisation of Myanmar should exercise it."

He said his role was to garner support to encourage the Myanmar government to address grievances on the economy, politics and social situation in the country.

On what exactly Asean should do, he said: "Since Asean has expressed very strong support for the role of the secretary-general and made very strong statements, we want to go a step further.

"We don't want the secretary-general and myself to be left alone. A sustained engagement along the lines that we've been saying would be welcome.

"What form it should take, we leave it to Asean."

He said he would not ask Asean to suspend Myanmar's membership.

He said the main obstacle to bringing about reconciliation in

Myanmar was the absence of dialogue between the government and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We need to remove that as an obstacle. This is the only way to begin to address the challenges facing the country.

"This dialogue has to be aimed at promoting national reconciliation that is all-inclusive. I feel all those who can contribute to finding solutions to the challenges faced in their country should be allowed to do so in freedom and in peace."

Gambari, who will visit Indonesia, India, China and Japan, said the UN was trying to encourage a change of behaviour in the Myanmar government towards democratisation and respect of human rights.

Myanmar's junta said yesterday it had detained nearly 3,000 people during a crackdown on pro-democracy protesters, adding that hundreds remained in custody and that it was hunting for others.

The official statement from the junta was published on the front

page of *The New Light of Myanmar*, a government mouthpiece.

"Those who led, got involved in and supported the unrest which broke out in September were called in and are being interrogated.

"Some are being called in for questioning and those who should be released will be."

The statement said 2,927 people had been arrested since the crackdown started and nearly 500 were in custody.

In their last tally of arrests, released on Oct 8, the junta said nearly 2,100 had been arrested.

Everyone released from custody was required to sign "pledges", the statement said without elaborating.

The junta has said 10 people were killed when troops fired into crowds of peaceful protesters during the Sept 26-27 crackdown.

Diplomats and dissidents said the death toll was higher and that up to 6,000 people were seized, including thousands of monks who led the rallies, according to the Associated Press.