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# PM: Yangon should release detainees

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DATUK Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is endorsing the strong statement by Asean foreign ministers who have urged the Myanmar government to resume efforts at national reconciliation and release all political detainees, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

The prime minister admitted that the policy of constructive engagement adopted by Asean had failed as Myanmar's progress to democracy was too slow.

"The Myanmar government has submitted progress reports on its efforts towards free and fair elections and had given continued assurances that reforms were underway. But reviewing the latest situation in the country, it is obvious that there has not been much progress.

"This is the reason Asean decided to issue a strong statement to Myanmar. I agree with the spirit and principle of the statement and discussed the issue with Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid

Albar. The Myanmar government has used force on protesters which has resulted in deaths," he told Malaysian reporters here.

Earlier, Asean foreign ministers met at the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly and said they were appalled at the reports of automatic weapons being used and demanded the Myanmar government immediately desist from using violence against demonstrators.

The foreign ministers of nine of the 10 Asean countries expressed their revulsion to Myanmar Foreign Minister Nyan Win over reports that the demonstrations were being suppressed by force and that there had been fatalities.

They strongly urged Myanmar to resume efforts at national reconciliation with all parties concerned and work towards a peaceful transition to democracy.

They expressed their concern to Nyan Win that the developments in Myanmar had a serious impact

on the reputation and credibility of Asean and noted that Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong would be writing to junta leader General Than Shwe.

The foreign ministers backed UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's decision to send special envoy Ibrahim Gambari to Myanmar and urged Yangon to co-operate fully with him as his role as a neutral interlocutor could help defuse the dangerous situation.

Abdullah said Asean had previously held steadfastly to its policy of non-interference but in view of the recent incident, the foreign ministers felt it was necessary to urge the Myanmar government to act quickly to institute reforms and begin talks to restore democracy.

"The formula of constructive engagement has not succeeded even though we have been patient for many years. This time, the Asean members will ensure that Myanmar adheres and fulfils the

regional grouping's request."

Abdullah also held talks with Dr Srgjan Kerim, the current president of the UN General Assembly who has invited Malaysia to be a member of the "Friends of the Chair" to help in the reform of the world body.

He explained that the "Friends of the Chair" was an informal but influential grouping which would put forward suggestions and recommendations on reforming the Security Council and bringing about changes to the UN to make it more effective.

Abdullah described the invitation as an honour for Malaysia.

The grouping would involve countries representing the various regions to advise Kerim on the changes needed to enhance the world body's image.

The recommendations could then be discussed at the General Assembly for adoption.

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