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Najib

A "NETWORK OF BRIDGES" TO GREATER UNDERSTANDING

By: Neville D'Cruz

SYDNEY, Nov 3 (Bernama) -- Education Minister Datuk Najib Tun Razak has called for the establishment of "a network of bridges" among Asian countries to better understand each other's history, tradition and cultural values.

"One could identify many civilisations within Asia -- Malay/Islamic, Chinese, Indian and others. There must be bridges to link these civilisations.

"Then we need to build a super-bridge to couple the larger Asian civilisations with that of others, such as western civilisations. After all, no civilisation has developed without any influence from others," he said Friday night.

Najib was delivering the 18th Asian Lecture of the Asia-Australia Institute at the swank Riz-Carlton Hotel in exclusive Double Bay, Sydney.

Speaking on the topic "Asian Values", Najib, who is also the chairman of the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre, said the Asian value debate, although having an international impact, was very much a debate within Asia.

He said the moral dilemma was on what should be done and how the society should be engineered.

"These are some difficult questions that governments and societies alike must face. To me, the Asian values debate takes place within this difficult moral context," he said.

Najib said there was still a widening gap of understanding between and among cultures.

"Even within Asia, there is so much ignorance. There are even suspicions within ourselves. Our Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) mentioned not too long ago about the fact that some Asian countries trust non-Asians more than they do of Asians. This is clearly evident in some parts of the region," he said, adding that there was a need therefore to strengthen the understanding among Asian countries first.

Najib said since the process of understanding took time for "we need to constantly upgrade ourselves in the factory of knowledge ... for knowledge could well bridge the gap of ignorance.

He said dialogues, cultural or otherwise, should be encouraged.

"I would like to call for the establishment of many intertwined and interrelated bridges -- a network of bridges. Bridges must be set-up from within Asia and between Asia and other regions," he said.

"It is our hope that by building and constructing bridges, we will also ensure that we will be less tempted to resort to stereotyping and being judgmental. Many of us are often guilty of both."

Najib said he would like to see "the harmonisation of civilisations" through understanding and the use of dialogues as tools, rather than resorting to the use of traditional force. -- BERNAMA

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