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NEWS

'Southeast Asia can lead Islamic renaissance'

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SUBSTANCE: Tap region's potential to grow economically and socially, says Najib

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SOUTHEAST Asia can be a catalyst for an Islamic renaissance to inspire independence among Muslim communities to face the current economic challenges.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday that such a huge potential in reviving the glory of Islam must be tapped and the term "Islamic revivalism" must be all-encompassing and holistic concerning global demands.

"Islamic revivalism should not be confined only to issues and matters but substance as well.

"(In other words) Islamisation should not be about appearance only but include, among others, economic development, conservation of syariah laws, political distinction and better regional cooperation," he said in his speech at the opening of a three-day seminar here on "Islam in Southeast Asia:

challenges and hope".

His speech was read by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom.

Najib said Southeast Asia could create a "knowledge-triumphant" society among Muslim communities so that they could compete globally by employing the amalgamation of religious and other knowledge.

Scholars, historians and geo-strategist experts have recognised that the Islamic values in Southeast Asia differed vastly from other Islamic worlds, he said, adding that moderation in Islam was appealing and acceptable in the region.

As of now, the combined gross domestic product among Asean countries has peaked at US\$1.2 tril-

lion (RM3.6 trillion).

"With a population of 600 million among Asean members, Muslims make up significantly the number. But we should not be (too) sentimental and melancholic of

the great Islamic achievements in the past, without looking at the challenges ahead.

"In the Malaysian context, efforts and economic planning that have been implemented by the government is currently on the right track."

He said that the economic, social, political and governmental transformation was taking place in a conducive atmosphere.

"Social and economic developments are being done correlatively. The potential of the younger generation is being harnessed for future opportunities,

development and self-growth.

"Women's role is being expanded. Tithes and other social institutions are being streamlined and Islamic banking is held upon a pedestal," said Najib.

In the context of Southeast Asia, Najib said there were still a number of matters that needed to be resolved and improved upon.

Najib said there was a need to reassert the right perspective of the region from the point of view of outsiders, to avoid a perception that it was riddled with poverty, civil wars and political issues.

"This is the time when we sit together and find new ideas, devise new programmes that can be explored by Malay-Muslims in Southeast Asia. We can never ignore what is taking place in the region.

"However, it must be done through proper political and diplomatic channels. It is not our way to interfere in the internal matters of a country. But in certain matters and issues, we will voice it on the right platform."

"We should not be (too) sentimental and melancholic of the great Islamic achievements in the past, without looking at the challenges ahead."
Datuk Seri Najib Razak