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'Resources needed to boost an Asean for all'

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Funding will fulfil people's dreams, PM tells members

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia will focus on boosting the Asean secretariat coffers as it spearheads an initiative to establish a "One Asean for All" inclusive policy.

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said proper funding and resources were vital for Asean institutions, including the secretariat, as more countries express a wish to engage the regional grouping.

Describing the current members' annual contribution of US\$1.7mil (RM5.61mil) each to the Asean secretariat as pittance, the Prime Minister called on them to contribute more on a voluntary basis.

"And all members would have equal power to decide how these additional funds are to be utilised," he said when opening the National Colloquium on Malaysia's chairmanship of Asean 2015.

Najib said Malaysia would be the centre of attention next year when the Asean Community was established. People-centred Asean is next year's theme.

"A people-centred Asean will be a sharper instrument for the realisation of our people's dreams for a more effective and responsive governance, better standards of living, strengthened environment protection, further empowerment for women and greater opportunity for all.

"We want to build an Asean which reflects the dreams of our people, is at ease with itself and ready to contribute positively to global affairs," he added.

Najib also said the MH370 crisis had accentuated the need for Asean-led institutions, including the East Asia Summit, to explore new ways of promoting cooperation in search and rescue operations.

"So that we are better prepared

when tragedy strikes," he said.

"The creation of strong, robust and efficient Asean institutions would also be a priority for Malaysia."

Najib also outlined four challenges for Asean in the post 2015 period.

"First we need to address the gap between the 'Asean-way' and rule-based approaches.

"Secondly, Asean goals must be expressed in more concrete and operational terms," he said.

Najib said the third was to ensure Asean's achievements and significance were widely known.

Najib said a survey by the Asean secretariat in 2012 showed that only 34% of Malaysians had heard of the Asean Community, compared with 96% of Laotians.

He said the fourth challenge was to strengthen coordination and coherence to promote efficiency and avoid duplication.