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Najib calls for Muslim unity

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FOSTERING TIES:
He extends olive branch to Pas president Hadi

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday moved in to initiate efforts to bridge the divide among Muslims in the country by calling on Pas to foster closer ties with those with different political school of thoughts.

Sharing the same stage as Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang at the Al-Azhar Alumni Regional Conference (Multaqa Serantau) here, Najib, in his speech, invited Hadi to bring Muslims together.

The prime minister began by asking the audience to recite *al-Fatihah* for Hadi's sister, Zainab Awang

Muhammad, who died early yesterday.

Najib, the Umno president, told Hadi, who is an alumni of the Al-Azhar University, that the party he led was ready to work with Pas for the greater good of the ummah.

"I, on behalf of my party, and Tuan Guru, who is representing his party, will continue to hold on to Allah's calling. Let us be united as Muslims," said Najib to a rousing round of applause from the audience.

The prime minister cited verse 103 of *Surah Aali Imran* from the Quran, requiring Muslims to be united.

Promising to keep the peace that

currently existed and to prevent a split among the ummah, Najib said Muslim unity must be based on spiritual guidance and forward thinking.

In building on the country's unity, he said, Muslims must also respect the views and opinions of non-Muslims, including their religions.

Najib said Muslims today were faced with many challenges, including the existence of those who narrowly interpreted Islam and abused the concept of jihad, which was espoused by groups, such as the Islamic State, which had no problems killing other Muslims who disagreed with them.

Another was the liberal interpretation of the religion which conflicted with the views of the Muslim majority.

"This liberal thinking... allows religion to be interpreted freely in the name of upholding human rationale and logic. We need to focus on building on unity and we have to think about what would happen if it were to crumble.

"This must be done with forward thinking and informed measures."

The event, which ends today, has been touted as a platform to promote unity among Muslims in the country, which is said to have been eroded by politicking.

In the Umno general assembly last week, Najib had offered Pas the olive branch in the spirit of mending cracks among the Malays.

Pas reciprocated warmly to the call made by Najib.

At yesterday's event, Najib also agreed with Hadi who, in his speech earlier, said Malaysia and the Muslim world could survive without Western interference.

"Lately, there have been tendencies to interpret Islam not only rigidly... then there are those who tend to interpret the religion loosely..."

"I agree with Tok Guru Hadi. We do not need Western experts to dictate the Muslim world. We must help each other. For example, Malaysia will receive 3,000 Syrians (war refugees). It is a must for a Muslim country to help fellow Muslims," said Najib.

He said he remembered how the government had helped Hadi, who was among the three deputy heads

of International Union of Muslim Scholars tasked to spearhead efforts to resolve differences between warring factions in Yemen in 2010.

"This is another example of how Islamic unity, which transcends ideologies, can be employed practically."

On Islamic development, Najib said achievements through the implementation of *syariah maqasid* (the spirit of Islamic law) index in various sectors would be detailed in a report due in March.

"Let people know that we are serious in our commitment to uphold Islam. This is not rhetoric."

Najib and Hadi were at ease with each other. They were so engrossed in talking to each other that the master of ceremonies had to approach the Pas leader and remind him that the alumni had prepared a souvenir for him.

Present were Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom, Al-Azhar deputy president Professor Dr Abbas Shouman and Kelantan Deputy Menteri Besar Datuk Mohd Amar Nik Abdullah, who is also Pas vice-president.