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We are now one big family

The 10-nation Asean Community set to be born on Dec 31, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR: With a single synchronised beating of a variety of drums by the 10 Asean leaders, the formation of the much-awaited Asean Community (AC) was formally announced.

The AC comes into being on Dec 31, a landmark achievement for the 48-year-old regional association whose member countries have widely diverse social, economic and political backgrounds.

The community will be larger in terms of population than even the European Union or North America, and could well rival India and China in the years to come.

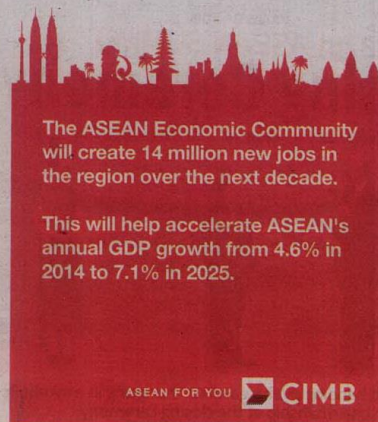
The regional community is a monumental effort by every regional member country to bring their nations closer through greater economic integration and social uplift, while ensuring the region remains secure and stable.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the idea of a community started in Bali 12 years ago, followed by blueprints and action plans.

"And today, on behalf of Asean member states represented at the 27th Asean Summit here in Kuala Lumpur, it is my solemn duty and privilege as the chair of Asean 2015 to pronounce the establishment of the Asean Community on Dec 31," he said at the signing of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the Asean Community.


At the event, Malaysia and the leaders of the nine other Asean nations – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – also signed the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Asean 2025: Forging Ahead Together.

After signing the declarations, the heads of



The ASEAN Economic Community will create 14 million new jobs in the region over the next decade.

This will help accelerate ASEAN's annual GDP growth from 4.6% in 2014 to 7.1% in 2025.

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government and state were ushered to the stage to make a single beat on the drum. The historic moment was marked by the beating of the ceremonial musical instruments of the Asean countries, symbolising unity in diversity.

Six of the grouping's eight dialogue partners – Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and Russia – as well as United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon were present.

Najib said Asean would now have to ensure that a truly single market and production base was created with freer movement of goods and services, as this – having common product standards, greater connectivity and removal of trade barriers – would be one that was primed to expand.

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Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak

"As it is, our combined GDP is expected to reach US\$4.7 trillion (RM20 trillion) by 2020. According to one forecast, Asean has the potential to be the fourth largest economy in the world as early as 2030, which is only 15 years from now.

"There is so much we stand to gain economically that will benefit the daily lives of all our citizens," said the Prime Minister.

But the AC goes beyond economy, said Najib, pointing out that it is also about recognising the special ties that bind the people and "making our citizens feel that Asean courses through their veins".

"That is what will make our community a reality. That is what will reward the efforts and contributions of previous leaders and peoples of Asean, without whose help we would not have reached this historic milestone.

"Our Asean Way has guided us and will continue to be our compass as we seek to realise a politically cohesive, economically integrated, socially responsible and a truly people-oriented and rules-based Asean," he said.

Speaking at a press conference after the

closing ceremony, Najib said that for the people of South-East Asia to understand the significance of the Asean Community, member countries must deliver direct and tangible benefits that could evoke a real sense of belonging towards the region.

He said Asean Community was not just about economic progress and achieving high Gross Domestic Product.

More importantly, it would be about creating a sense of identity among the people of this region, who should feel that they are part of a united Asean community of nations.

"It is important that we list down some low-hanging fruits that can be delivered every year until we reach 2025, which is at the end of the 10-year blueprint under the Asean Community," he said.

Najib shared his personal feelings, admitting that he felt emotional as he was about to sign the declaration.

"When the document was presented to me, I felt emotional because it suddenly dawned on me that my late father had signed the Bangkok Declaration in 1967.

"I had never imagined that I would be signing an important document 48 years later in Asean, on behalf of Malaysia," he said.

The declaration, he added, was the most important evolution that Asean had seen since its inception.

"Somehow, history and God decided that I should be there to sign the Declaration on Asean Community.

"It was personal and moving for me," the Prime Minister said.

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