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PM: People must benefit for Asean Community to succeed

KUALA LUMPUR: The people of Asean must be able to gain real economic and social benefits of closer regional integration in order for the Asean Community to succeed.

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who made the call, said the **Asean**- Community to be announced at the end of this year was a chance for Asean to transform into a more united region based on the three pillars of the economy, political-security and socio-cultural.

However, the governments of Asean member countries should do more to raise awareness among their people on the ongoing changes that would benefit them.

"For that transformation to take place, it must begin at home, in the countries of Asean - we must make Asean a tangible reality to all our citizens," the Prime Minister said in his opening address at the 48th Asean Foreign Ministers Meeting.

In his speech titled "Connecting Asean to

the World", Najib said masterplans such as the Asean Community and the Asean post-2015 Vision were milestones for the regional body.

However, such masterplans were not enough to create a greater sense of belonging to Asean among the people in the region.

Najib said that a people-centred Asean - which was also Malaysia's chosen theme for its chairmanship of the regional body this year - must mean a region where the people feel that they were not only part of Asean but that they collectively make up Asean.

To achieve this, Najib urged Asean countries to develop closer ties with each other in the travel sector, deepen business and economic integration.

Asean should also take advantage of its youthful, talented and increasingly skilled population of over 600 million people.

Najib cited several economic reports which

were upbeat about Asean's prospects, including one by the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group published in April.

The report noted how Asean's potential was greater than is commonly understood, an observation which Najib agreed with.

"We should be confident about our future, and we should be vocal about our confidence."

Najib added that one of the eight priorities set by Malaysia as chair this year was to enhance Asean's role as a global player, and with greater unity there was no reason why Asean should not play a more active role in international events.

"There are many issues today, such as climate change, transnational crime, the threat of violent extremism, migration and overlapping territorial claims that cannot be resolved by individual nations alone," said the Prime Minister.



Each ASEAN country will have new factories by 2018 as companies increase their manufacturing facilities by 40% over 5 years to take advantage of the ASEAN Economic Community.

This doubles ASEAN's total exports to US\$2.67 trillion by 2018.

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