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**Najib calls  
for an  
inclusive  
Asean as  
it turns 48**

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KUALA LUMPUR: Asean celebrated its 48th year yesterday with a reminder from its current chairman Malaysia - to continue to consolidate and build solidarity, unity and resilience among members.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said by putting these efforts in place, Asean could bring better progress for its people and be a force to be reckoned with, in Asia and internationally.

"Let us now join hands to forge ahead and build a long lasting, prosperous and inclusive future for Asean and its people," said Najib at the launch of the 48th Asean Day.

He narrated how Asean Day had a special resonance for him as his late father Tun Razak Hussein was one of the founding fathers.

He signed the Bangkok Declaration in 1967, which brought the grouping into being.

"I was a teenager then, but I was aware that this was a momentous occasion, and represented an important change in how countries in our region thought about each other and dealt with each other.

"The declaration bound us to actively promote peace, stability, growth, progress and development, with an emphasis on collaboration and mutual assistance," he added.

The Prime Minister said with a community of 600 million people, Asean today was on the verge of realising the Asean Community by the end of the year and poised to become a major global player.

In 15 years, Asean could well become the fourth largest market after the European Union, the United States and China.

Najib said Malaysia had chosen to emphasise the idea of a people-centred Asean under its chairmanship this year, which showed that the grouping had always been about its people, even though it had appeared to operate more at inter-government level at times.

"But the interests of its citizens have always been paramount and the peace that Asean helped bring about and maintain has been a very real prize for the hundreds of millions in our region.

"Now, however, is the time to ensure that Asean is a part of our people's daily lives.

"We need to raise awareness of Asean, its great achievements of the past and the brighter horizons for all it should bring about in the future," he said.