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PRIME NEWS

# Muslims in Asean urged to unite

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**'UNIQUELY PLACED':**  
Serve as collective voice of moderation, tolerance, says PM

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THE Muslim community in Asean should unite and serve as the collective voice of moderation and tolerance, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday.

In his speech, read out by Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki, at the launch of the inaugural Asean Mosque Festival (AMF), Najib said the 240 million Muslims in the region should act as a "unified congregation of the ummah".

"I need hardly tell you that in these dark times, the message that

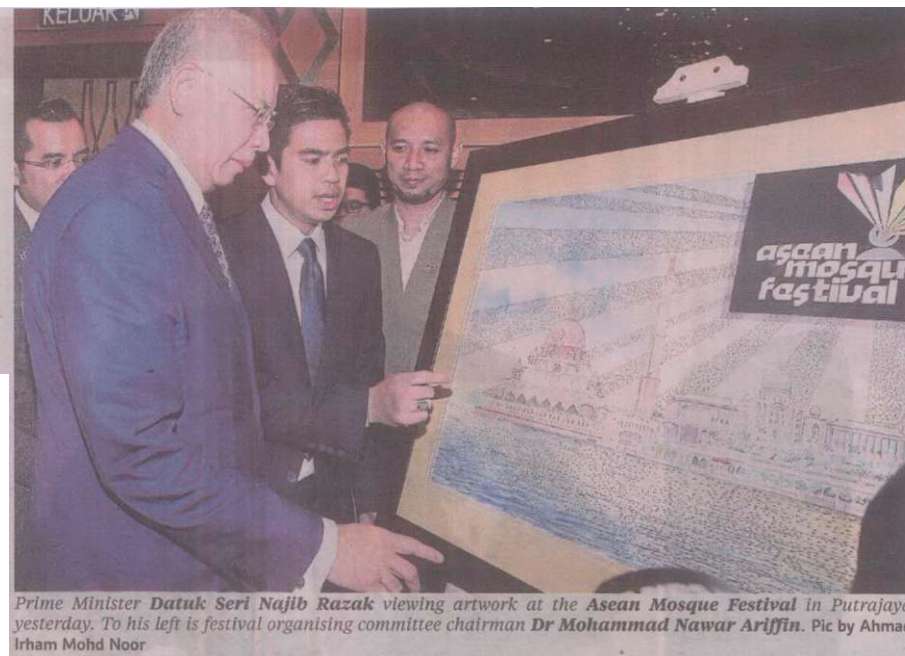
Islam is a religion of peace, justice and inclusivity needs to be spread far and wide. We (in Asean) are uniquely placed to do so."

Asyraf launched the festival, held at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre here, on behalf of the prime minister, who was able to attend only later in the afternoon.

"The story of Islam (as a religion of peace) should be repeated to both ourselves and others, so that (people) do not fall for the falsehoods of terrorists, who blaspheme the name of Islam and have brought death and destruction to so many," said Najib.

Under the theme "Knowledge, Ukhuwah and Understanding", AMF aims at redefining, supporting and enlarging the roles of mosques in the region, besides overcoming misconceptions about religions. It also aims at empowering the transformational values of mosques.

Present were Deputy International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Ahmad Maslan, industry professionals and Islamic scholars from the 10 Asean member states.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak viewing artwork at the Asean Mosque Festival in Putrajaya yesterday. To his left is festival organising committee chairman Dr Mohammad Nawar Ariffin. Pic by Ahmad Irfham Mohd Noor

Stressing the importance of mosques, Najib said they were more than just places of worship.

"They are also centres of education, as well as places at the heart of communities that bring people together, not just Muslims. They can and should play a valuable role in our efforts to celebrate diversity."

He expressed confidence that AMF would make a big difference for the good of the region.

"This initiative can be part of a wider effort towards better understanding and respect among our different faiths and ethnicities, which

is why I am glad that the IKHLAS Interfaith Conference is a key component of the festival. The conference is a multifaith event that brings together well-known scholars from across our 10 (Asean) nations to speak about religious traditions and beliefs."

Najib said there would be opportunities for everyone to deepen their understanding and promote a peaceful coexistence, as well as ask "hard questions" on religion.

"For instance, I note that one session asks the question, 'Moderate Muslim — is there such a thing?'. I

can assure you that the short answer is 'yes'. But, it's good to discuss such matters, for it can only reaffirm our faith in the necessity for moderation and its absolute centrality to Islam."

He said this was in line with Malaysia's goal to co-create a "people-oriented, people-centred and rules-based Asean community".

"There are rules that we must implement and a true single market to create. This festival is a notable contribution to that effort, as it concerns something at the core of the majority of our citizens' lives: their faith."