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PRIME NEWS

'All have a rightful place in Malaysia'

UNITY: Way forward is to understand each other, says PM

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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak with Christians for Peace and Harmony in Malaysia (CPHM) chairman Wong Kim Kong (in wheelchair) and certificate recipients at the launch of the movement in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Pic by Yazit Razali

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday dismissed the notion of any Malaysian being called a *pendatang* (immigrant) as "we all have a rightful place" in the future of this country.

Speaking at the launch of the Christians for Peace and Harmony in Malaysia (CPHM) movement here last night, the prime minister said *pendatang* should never be used to refer to a Malaysian as it was a divisive term that would segregate rather than unify the multi-cultural society of Malaysia.

"As prime minister, I will not allow for such notions to ignite and breed racial and religious conflict. I am an advocate of *wassathayah*, or moderation, in everything we do. In fact, all religions preach moderation, but when we have extremism, that is when we have racial and religious tension."

He said the government would do everything in its power to drive out extremists from the country, calling those involved in such activities "bigots" who abused religion for personal gains.

"The problem is not that we believe in different religions. The problem is that there are extremists in every religion. Religion itself, inherently, is moderate. Whether you are Muslim, Buddhist or Christian, there are people who abuse religion to achieve their narrow aims. They become bigots, they use religion to achieve some of their political goals. These are people we must confront, deal with and totally reject."

On that note, Najib consolidated the need for a law similar to the now-defunct Internal Security Act (ISA), but with improvements, as it prevented religious extremism from disrupting harmony in the country.

"We shouldn't see ourselves as a country that's divided and live in distinct compartments with a deep sense of suspicion, distrust and hostility towards one another. We need positive sentiments to override all of that. With love and mutual respect, a lot of our problems will go away since they are self- and man-made. If we believe in our country and we stay and act together, our future is limitless."

"There is no such thing as calling each other *pendatang*. We are all Malaysians. The difference is not what religion we belong to or where we are from. The difference is your love for Malaysia. Despite differences, we have come a long way. Even siblings think differently, what more, the citizens of a country. The only way forward is to understand. So, instead of defining ourselves by

to recognise the common interests."

Earlier, at the launch of the GOASEAN travel channel on Astro Channel 737, Najib said with Asean expecting to generate a combined gross domestic product of US\$3 trillion (RM11 trillion) by 2017, there was an opportunity to boost the travel industry and promote intra-region tourism.

He said the GOASEAN tourism-economic initiative, in particular, would spur investment and open doors to employment within Asean.

GOASEAN is the world's first Asean television channel packed with stories and useful tips for travellers that would boost tourism and spur the economy.

"GOASEAN provides the perfect opportunity to broadcast the benefits of our region to a global audience. It is a fine example of all that can be achieved when members of Asean work together," he said.

The initiative is Najib's brainchild to commemorate Malaysia's tenure as Asean chairman.

He said it would provide a further window into the world of the 10 member states of Asean.

"It will be a 24/7 travel channel dedicated to showcasing the natural beauty and rich cultural heritage our region offers... a platform to collectively promote Asean as a single tourism destination to the world."

Najib said the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development had forecast a gross domestic product annual growth for the Asean community at 5.6 per cent over the next five years, which made GOASEAN a fine example of innovation that drove growth, provided opportunities, attracted invest-

ments and helped develop and grow talent and infrastructure throughout the region.

He said it was estimated that the Asean middle class would hit 400 million by 2020, more than that of the United Kingdom and the United States combined.

Najib said a recent report showed that 44 per cent of consumers surveyed said they would spend spare cash on vacations, adding that there was a great opportunity to share information about travel.

PM posts wish to athletes

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has wished success to athletes in the SEA Games, which officially begins on Friday.

"Every success to all athletes and the nation's representatives at the SEA Games. Make us proud! #Say-aTeamMalaysia #SukanSEA2015"

he posted on Twitter and Facebook.

The Malaysian contingent, comprising 658 athletes, will participate in 35 of 36 events. A total of 206 officials are accompanying the athletes at the Games.

Singapore is hosting the 28th SEA Games. **Bcrnama**