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Closer integration spells global prowess, says Najib

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday that closer integration among Asean member states would allow them to combine their strengths and compete more effectively on the global stage.

"In doing so, we will be able to deliver meaningful and positive change to the livelihood and well-being of the 622 million people who call this region home," said the prime minister.

Improvements could be expected in many areas, including healthcare services, and in terms of improved access to education, he said in conjunction with the 27th Asean Summit and Related Summits here.

Asean leaders are set to sign a declaration marking the establishment of the Asean Community by year's end on Sunday.

The 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the Asean Community' entails closer integration through three pillars — economy, political security and socio-culture.

The region's leaders are also scheduled to adopt the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Asean 2025: Forging Ahead Together that lays out Asean's vision for the community in the next 10 years.

"These are very important agreements that will help further consolidate and strengthen Asean as we move towards ever greater cooper-

ation," Najib said of the two documents to be issued under Malaysia's stewardship of the 10-member bloc.

The prime minister, who will be welcoming world leaders such as Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, United States President Barack Obama and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, feels that 2015 has been a significant year for Asean.

Having had the privilege of chairing Asean this year, Najib said he could tell that there was a genuine desire for greater unity among member countries.

"And we are confident that we have set the community on the path to greater cooperation and cohesion."

Premised on political stability, equitable economic development and social responsibility, Najib

said the creation of the Asean Community was the culmination of a journey that started in 2007.

"It will mark the beginning of a new era that will see the transformation of Asean into one of the world's most competitive regions."

Najib said the greatest challenge in creating the Asean Community was the fact that there were very few precedents for what the region hoped to achieve.

"This is an enormous project involving 10 member states, over 600 million people and a combined economy with a GDP of more than US\$2.57 trillion (RM11 trillion)." Bemama

