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KL Summit ends on historic note

SEALED: Documents signed to herald greater integration and chart Asean's future



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak hands a gavel to Lao Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong in a symbolic handover of the Asean chairmanship to Laos during the closing ceremony of the 27th Asean Summit and Related Summits in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Pic by Yazit Razali

THE 27th Asean Summit and Related Summits closed on a historic note yesterday, with the signing of two documents — one that will herald greater regional integration and another that will chart the future of the regional grouping over the next 10 years.

The Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the Asean Community and the Asean 2025: Forging Ahead Together were the culmination of years of hard work by officials across the region as Malaysia winds down its chairmanship of Asean.

The day started with the Asean-New Zealand (Asean-NZ) 40th Anniversary Commemorative Summit.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak chaired the meeting, during which he lauded New Zealand for being among Asean's longest dialogue partners.

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key announced that his country would elevate its relationship with Asean to a strategic partnership and would invest NZ\$200 million (RM561 million) in the region.

The Asean-NZ summit was "plotted by the highlight of the day, the signing of the two documents in a stylish ceremony that echoed the positive mood of the region that the

two documents will herald.

In his speech at the ceremony, Najib said the notion of an Asean Community went beyond economic concerns.

"It is about all of us being Asean, recognising that something special binds us, and making our citizens feel that Asean courses through their veins," he said.

A slew of other summits followed that. The premier meeting was the East Asia Summit (EAS), where the 10 Asean leaders met with their counterparts from the eight dialogue nations — Australia, New Zealand, China, South Korea, Japan, Russia, India and the United States — as well as the secretary-general of the United Nations.

The EAS is seen as a premier leadership forum in the region to discuss political and security matters and it marked its 10th edition in the city of its birth.

Against a backdrop of recent terror attacks in Paris and Mall, terrorism figured high on the closed-door meetings agenda.

In his opening remarks, Najib said: "This cannot come at a more critical time, with the existence of international issues which require

our attention."

Other summits that followed included those with Japan, South Korea and the UN.

Another key document that was signed was a pact to agree that talks on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) would go on into next year.

The pressure is on to conclude the RCEP, a trade pact that involves Asean and Australia, New Zealand, China, India, Japan and South Korea.

Najib said more time was needed

to conclude the negotiations because of the challenges faced.

The meetings all went slightly into extra time, but all the Asean leaders looked relaxed at the closing ceremony.

At the closing, Najib symbolically handed over the chairmanship of Asean to Laos Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong.

Thammavong unveiled the theme of his country's chairmanship of Asean next year, "Turning vision into reality for a dynamic Asean Community".

At a press conference after the closing, Najib was all smiles.

He said he was greatly moved when he signed the Declaration to Establish the Asean Community because his father, Tun Abdul Razak, had signed the Bangkok Declaration — the document that established Asean in 1967.

Page 1 pic: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Asean leaders after the signing of the two major declarations in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.