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# Quicken pace, Asean told

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Community also needs full transformation to reach its potential, says PM

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Asean needs a complete transformation to achieve its potential and speed up the pace to be one of the brightest stars of the Asian century.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Asean needed a transformation of rules, procedures and habits.

"But we also need a transformation of the mind, as we learn to think of ourselves more as Asean, act as Asean and reap the benefits of being Asean.

"Our national identity and interests can co-exist and even complement Asean's identity and interest," Najib said in his address at the World Economic Forum on Asean here yesterday.

The Prime Minister said Asean should be flattered with the attention it was getting from advanced economies in wanting to do business and having free trade deals.

"However, in order to realise the potential of these agreements and associations, it is essential that we carry on the process of deepening our community.

"It is a big task. Removing non-tariff measures is a case in point.

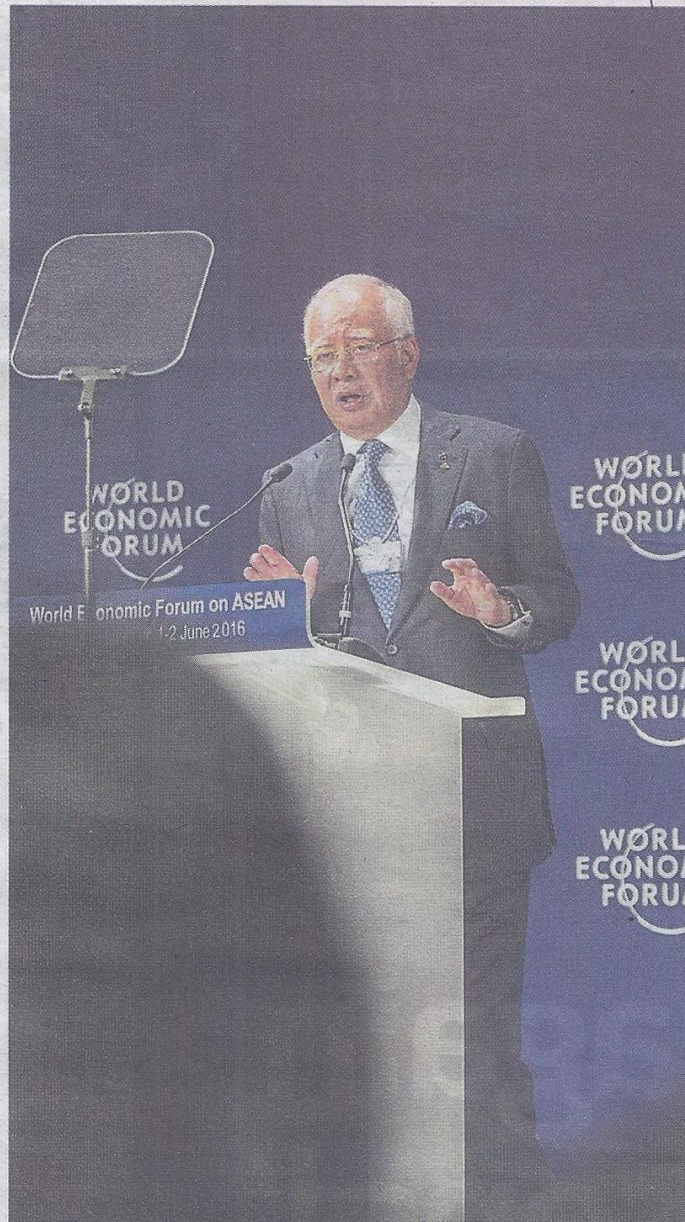
"According to a recent joint report by the United Nations and the Economic Research Institute for Asean and East Asia, while tariff rates were halved between 2000 and 2015, non-tariff measures actually tripled over that time - from 1,634 measures to 5,975.

"We need to find more efficient ways of ensuring we recognise each other's documentation, whether it is for pharmaceutical products, professional certificates or port entry requirements."

Najib said if these barriers were not eradicated, the Asean Economic Community would never reach fruition.

He also said Asean had been criticised for moving slowly in the past.

"That might have been the right pace then,



**World stage:** Najib delivering his address at the World Economic Forum on Asean in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

as much as our region recovered from war and division.

"The Asean way may have been steady but it brought us unity, peace and prosperity.

"However, today, we live in a fast-paced world and the demographic dividend of young populations will become a liability if we do not take active steps to integrate, innovate and advance."