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Najib's advice to Asean

> The grouping should take active steps to integrate, innovate and advance: PM

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak called on Asean to embrace transformation by taking active steps to integrate, innovate and advance as they were crucial ingredients for Southeast Asia to emerge as a single and cohesive economic entity.

Asean, with a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US\$2.6 (RM10.8) trillion, is already the seventh largest economy in the world.

The fact that the World Economic Forum has chosen to focus on Asean specifically, this year, is a testament to the growing significance of the region.

"What Asean can be, its potential should be our call for action," he said,

adding that the region had been criticised for moving slowly in the past.

"That might have been the right pace then, as much of our region recovered from war and division.

"The Asean way may have been steady, but it brought us unity, peace and prosperity," he said at the World Economic Forum on Asean titled, "Shaping the Asean Agenda For Inclusion and Growth" here yesterday.

"Today, however, Asean lives in a fast-paced world, and the demographic dividend of young population will become a liability if the region does not take active steps to integrate, innovate and advance. So, now we need the

transformation of Asean," he added.

Najib, among others, touched upon the number of trade negotiations and deals that the region is involved in.

"So much attention is being paid to Asean. We should be flattered."

However, in order to realise the potential of all the agreements and associations, he said it was essential that Asean carried on the process of deepening its community, which was indeed a big task.

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

Najib said the Asean Economic Community would never reach its true fruition if the region did not work to eradicate barriers.

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