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# PM: We will speak in one voice

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Asean must be united to face challenges affecting the region, says Najib

MERGAWATI  
ZULFAKAR  
in Vientiane



**VIENTIANE:** Asean leaders attending their summit here yesterday acknowledged that the recent challenges faced by the region could derail their unity and agreed to speak in one voice representing 600 million people.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Asean cannot afford to break ranks and must be united to be much stronger.

"It is important for us to stress on Asean unity because we speak on behalf of more than 600 million people as opposed to a single nation.

"There are challenges principally because we have different takes on certain issues and how these issues should be handled.

"But we can keep on saying that we can continue to be a rules-based organisation and Asean must promote (the) people-centred (concept) and must be seen as an organisation that engages with major powers in a friendly way while maintaining certain principles," he told the Malaysian media at the end of the first day of the summit.

Asean unity came into question over the issue of the South China Sea, claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam – and with members like Laos and Cambodia



**Leaders unite:** (From left) Najib linking arms with Myanmar's Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, Vietnam's President Tran Dai Quang, Laos' President Bounnhang Vorachith, Laos' Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen and Indonesia's President Joko Widodo at the National Convention Centre in Vientiane. — AP

being seen as pro-China.

Najib also said he spoke briefly with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on the sidelines of the summit.

"We exchanged views on the current situation in the Philippines, particularly the attack in Davao City that killed 14 people," he said.

He also said that Duterte expressed his wish to visit Malaysia but the proposed date clashed with Najib's official visit to Germany at the end of this month.

The world media is closely watching Duterte's conduct throughout the summit as he has made controversial remarks on US

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thestartv.com



President Barack Obama and issued threats against the Abu Sayyaf group.

This is the first year the leaders met after the setting up of the Asean Community, launched in Kuala Lumpur last year.

The Asean 10 leaders will also hold separate summits with Obama, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang where the 25th year of Asean-China relations will be commemorated.

Meanwhile, Najib reminded Malaysian businessmen to protect the good name and image of the country. He said the Malaysian name is a good brand and image, adding that they would be doing a disservice if they were to criticise the country.

"People griped about Malaysia's 6% GST and here it is 10%. This is an example that you can tell people back home on the good things in Malaysia."

The business meeting was organised by the Ministry of Trade and Industry for the Malaysian business community that was here to attend the 28th and 29th Asean and related summits which began yesterday.



Duterte regrets  
name calling:  
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