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# 'Asean folk must take part'

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## Citizens need to foster sense of community, says Najib

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Asean citizens should not only benefit from the regional grouping but also participate in and contribute towards Asean Community-building efforts for the association to progress, said Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

The Prime Minister said a prerequisite to establish a true Asean Community was to instil a sense of belonging and identity within and across the people of the 10 nations.

"It is only then that we will have an Asean Community that is truly cohesive and reflects the aspiration of its people," he said in a statement in conjunction with the 49th Asean Day celebration yesterday.

Najib said much remained to be done before Asean could consider itself a single and united communi-

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Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak

ty in practice as well as in name.

"Building it is a continuous and evolving process and the momentum must be maintained to ensure political cohesion, economic integration and social and regional inclusion," he added.

"Our (Asean) Community must

be able to respond effectively to the emerging threats and challenges presented by the rapidly changing regional and global landscape," Najib said.

Therefore, he said, the theme selected by Laos as Asean Chairman this year, "Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic Asean Community", was timely and appropriate, reflecting the Asean people's will to continue to integrate its region and solidify its community.

Najib said that almost five decades ago, Asean's founding fathers signed the Bangkok Declaration that formally established the association, adding it was a historic day, marking a commitment by South-East Asian nations to work towards a future of peace, stability and pros-

perity for the region.

"As we celebrate Asean Day this year, we do so for the first time as a single Community. For on Dec 31, 2015, under the chairmanship of Malaysia, the 10 Asean member states inaugurated the Asean Community.

"This was a significant milestone for the region, building on the resilience and dynamism that have been the hallmarks of Asean through its journey of nearly half a century," he said, adding that Asean people should be proud of what had been accomplished.

Established on Aug 8, 1967, Asean comprises Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. — Bernama