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'Transform to achieve full potential'

HUGE OPPORTUNITIES: Need to switch rules, procedures, habits and minds, says PM

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ASEAN needs to undertake a comprehensive transformation to grasp the huge opportunities that lie ahead and achieve its full potential, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

"What Asean can be, its potential, should be our call for action. Will we, the leaders, captains of industry, policymakers, commentators and NGOs in Asean, heed that call?"

"Will we do more to enhance Asean connectivity, reduce development and income inequality, and close the gap? We would not be doing our duty by our peoples if we do not," he said in his speech to regional leaders at the plenary session of the World Economic Forum on Asean, here, yesterday.

Reminding the audience of the progress Asean has made, the prime minister highlighted that it had overtaken China in terms of foreign

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director investment in 2013, and delivered growth of over five per cent from 2007 to last year, at a time when economies were struggling with financial crisis.

Najib said Asean needs to continue deepening links and overcoming barriers within the community, highlighting the removal of non-tariff measures as a case in point.

"The Asean Economic Community will never reach true fruition if we do not work to eradicate these bar-



Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Najib Razak** (third from left) with (from left) Indonesia Vice-President **Jusuf Kalla**, Cambodia Prime Minister **Samdech Techo Hun Sen**, Timor-Leste Prime Minister **Dr Rul Maria de Araujo**, Vietnam Prime Minister **Trinh Dinh Dung** and WEF member of the managing board and head of the centre for regional strategies **Philipp Rösler** at the World Economic Forum on Asean yesterday. Bernama pic

riers. When we talk about the bright future that Asean could have, these are the kinds of issues that have to be tackled in order for us to reach that horizon.

"They are complex, detailed and require an extraordinary amount of coordination ... The tasks involved in harmonisation will be immense. We must ensure that the right machinery and funding is there to ensure smooth collaboration, and then to expedite implementation."

Sharing the story of Malaysia's own transformation as an example, Najib spoke of the Government Transformation Programme and New Economic Model. The plans have resulted in the creation of 1.8 million jobs, increased gross nation-

al income by nearly 50 per cent, and helped Malaysia remain resilient during the global financial crisis.

Following the success, Malaysia has shared its national transformation programmes with countries in Africa and parts of Central Asia and India, he added.

The prime minister also called for Asean lanes at all major points of entry across the member states, speeding up progress on mutual recognition agreements, allowing students to spend part of their university degrees in other Asean countries, support for the role of micro, small and medium enterprises; and further integrating the services sector across the community.

"What is required is nothing short

of a complete transformation if Asean is to achieve its potential ... We need 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 then reap the benefits of being Asean.

"Our national identity and interests can co-exist and even compliment Asean's identity and interest," said Najib.

The prime minister said Asean had been criticised for moving slowly in the past, which might have been the right pace then, as much of the region recovered from war and division. The Asean way brought unity, peace and prosperity.