

Newspaper	THE STAR
Date	6 SEPTEMBER 2016

# All set for hectic three days

## Leaders meet in Laos to map out Asean's direction

*The Star - 6/9/2016*

**MERGAWATI  
ZULFAKAR**  
in Vientiane



ASEAN leaders started arriving here yesterday to attend their first summit, nearly a year after the launch of the Asean Community in Kuala Lumpur.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, already seen as a veteran regional leader, will be joined by first timers like Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Aung Sang Suu Kyi who is representing Myanmar president.

The three-day 28th and 29th Summits, hosted back to back by Laos, will provide the opportunity for the leaders to exchange views, on the future direction of Asean and its conduct of external relations as well as important regional and international issues.

Asean officials noted that it was only the first year of the Asean Community establishment and not expect miracles in wanting a quick Asean integration.

"What is important is for the leaders to find common ground in trying to maintain unity and centrality," said a diplomat.

Asean unity is being tested over the South China Sea issue as four of its members - Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam - are claimants to the maritime area, apart from China and Taiwan.

Asean and China have signed a Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and have been working on a binding Code of Conduct (CoC) to address numerous issues faced by claimant countries in the overlapping maritime area.

Last month, a breakthrough in talks at the Asean-China joint work-



**Red carpet welcome:** Najib and his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor arriving at the Wattay International Airport in Vientiane, Laos. Accompanying them are Laos Science and Technology Minister Prof Dr Bobilekham Vongdara and Malaysian Ambassador to Laos Datuk Than Tai Hing. — Bernama

ing group (JWG) was achieved and officials have set a deadline to finish a framework for a CoC by the middle of next year.

The JWG has also approved a guideline for a China and Asean hotline for use during maritime emergencies and a joint declaration that the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (Cues), signed by more than 20 Pacific nations in 2014, applies to the South China Sea.

Najib and Asean leaders will receive documents on the hotline and Cues during the Asean and China summit tomorrow.

Asean officials also said at the East Asian Summit (EAS) that a meeting between the Asean 10 and

Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the United States on Thursday will adopt a declaration on migrants and trafficking in persons.

The declaration is in support of the Asean Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Actip) signed during last year's Asean summit in Kuala Lumpur.

Actip's objectives, among others, are to effectively prevent and combat trafficking in persons, especially women and children; protect and assist human trafficking victims with full respect for their human rights; and promote cooperation among the relevant parties.

The EAS declaration precedes the

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) hosting a high level summit on Sept 19 to address large movements and migrants with the aim of bringing countries together behind a coordinated approach.

Officials said the UNGA event in New York is important as Malaysia is one of the affected countries in terms of migrants and refugees.

"Principally, we want collective and concerted efforts and action by the international community, including the UN, to tackle the problems," said an official.

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