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50TH ANNIVERSARY

# PM: PUT CITIZENS AT HEART OF ASEAN

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Asean nations should prioritise citizens' aspirations, says Najib

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**A**SEAN member countries must put their peoples' aspirations at the centre of community-building efforts to make the association relevant and a tangible reality to all.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said all 10 Asean countries must prioritise good governance, transparency, high standard of living, sustainable development, empowerment of women, as well as providing greater opportunities to grow.

"Key to ensuring that we have a people-centred Asean is putting our citizens at the heart of Asean.

"We must raise awareness of our association's history and achievements, and explain what we hope to do in the future as the people of Asean," he said at the Asean 50th anniversary celebration here yesterday.

Present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman and International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed.

He said the Asean Way had brought stability and prosperity in the region, adding that many had said it was a far more suitable model for the bloc and other developing nations.

Asean was recognised as a primary driving force in the regional political, security and economic architecture, said Najib.

He added that the Asean Re-

gional Forum and the East Asia Summit had brought together major powers to negotiate and discuss important issues.

"It is Asean that is leading and driving forward the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which will bring opportunities to nearly half the world's population, representing 30 per cent of the global gross domestic product.

"At the same time, we have maintained the spirit of friendship, taking decisions by consensus and recognising the sovereignty of individual countries. We unite in Asean, but we don't interfere in the affairs of our neighbours."

He also described the 50th anniversary as an important occasion for himself as his late father, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, who was then deputy prime minister, was one of the five founders who signed the Bangkok Declaration, which signified the birth of Asean.