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# Najib: Asean moving forward with RCEP

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*This would bring new opportunities to nearly half the world's population, representing 30% of global GDP*

by P PREM KUMAR

ASEAN is moving forward with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in line with its goal to become the fourth-largest economy by 2050, according to Prime Minister (PM) Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Razak.

In a speech yesterday, Najib said Asean leads and drives RCEP further as it would bring new opportunities to nearly half the world's population, representing 30% of the global gross domestic product (GDP).

"With a combined GDP of US\$2.6 trillion (RM11.2 trillion), Asean is the world's sixth-largest economy, and is projected to become the fourth-largest economy in the



Najib attending the 50th Anniversary of Asean celebration in KLCC. The PM says Asean is now recognised as a primary driving force in the regional political, security and economic architecture

world by 2050 at the latest, with some estimating we will reach that position by 2030," he said at the 50th Anniversary of Asean celebration.

Also present at the event were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid

Hamidi, Foreign Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman and International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed.

The PM also attributed the Asean way — unity among its 10 members — as an

effective way forward.

"Many authorities are now saying that it was a far more suitable model for Asean members and for other developing nations, than those of other regional associations that were now finding themselves troubled by division," Najib added.

Asean's strength, he said, is based on the spirit of friendship and making decisions based on mutual consensus, while recognising the sovereignty of each country.

Najib further said Asean is now recognised as a primary driving force in the regional political, security and economic architecture, which saw major powers being brought together to negotiate and discuss important issues of the day through dialogues including the Asean Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit.

The Asean Way is a series of principles that were adopted when Asean was formed in 1967, which places extreme emphasis on national sovereignty and the commitment to non-intervention in affairs

of member countries.

Touching on the Asean Community, Najib said Malaysia remains proud that the Declaration on the Establishment of the Asean Community was issued during the country's chairmanship in November 2015.

"We reaffirmed our past commitments, and underlined our aspiration towards creating a rules-based, people-oriented and people-centred Asean Community in which our peoples participate and benefit fully from Asean integration and community building.

"We also produced a roadmap that will guide us during the decade up until 2025, as we aim for a community that is politically cohesive, economically integrated and socially responsible," he said, noting that the key to having a "People-Centred Asean" was putting the citizens at the heart of Asean.

He said Asean at 50 was a milestone, and it meant a great deal to him personally since his late father Tun

Abdul Razak Hussein was one of the five founding fathers who signed the Bangkok Declaration.

"I was a teenager then, but I was aware that this was a momentous occasion, one that represented an important collective regional effort to build lasting bonds of friendship with one another.

"It is worth thinking back to that time, and remembering that our region was beset by many conflicts and troubles. Stability and peace were not to be taken for granted — in fact, quite the opposite," he said.

Asean was established on Aug 8, 1967, in Bangkok, with the signing of the Asean Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding fathers of Asean, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Brunei Darussalam joined Asean on Jan 7, 1984; Vietnam on July 28, 1995; Laos and Myanmar on July 23, 1997; and Cambodia on April 30, 1999, making up what is today the 10 member states of Asean.