

**Muslim Togetherness Must Be Strengthened To Renew Spirit Of Unity - Najib  
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 4 (Bernama) -- Muslim togetherness must be strengthened through the worldview of Islam to renew the spirit of unity and the bond of community among Muslims, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said these were among three imperatives that should be taken into account if Muslim communities were seeking a wider and more active role in Asean.

He said other imperatives were the need to respect the principles of diversity and to establish social justice based on timeless universal religious principles.

"It must be noted that these three imperatives must be undertaken within a cohesive framework of Islam which promotes a proper appreciation of Islam as a force for good humanity, progress and development."

Najib said this in his inaugurating address at the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) International Symposium on "Islam and The New Era of Asean Countries: Unity of Worldview Towards A Shared Prosperity", here, Tuesday.

Also present was former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is also IKIM chairman.

The two-day conference is to identify bases of Muslim cooperation through the worldview of Islam and to search for appropriate initiatives in the face of present-day crisis of civilisation and the socio-economy.

"Islam is a global faith that binds Arabs, Persians, Egyptians, Berbers, Turks, Europeans, Africans, Indo-Pakistanis, Caucasians, Chinese and Malay-Indonesians together in a common bond," said Najib.

"As there are almost 220 million Asean Muslims who constitute about 40 per cent of the Asean population today, there is a need to renew the understanding of Islam.

"We must emphasise our common heritage and put aside any sectarian differences which can lead to division and conflict. We must prioritise our investment in education and skills."

To respect the principles of diversity, he said differences in terms of religious traditions, culture, language and skin colour must be duly appreciated. Najib said basic unity must remain unaltered while religion offered mighty power of transformation to achieve happiness and well-being.

"With religion, we rise above all petty things to a new height, to the heaven of stability which requires a rejection against any form of criminal violence, extremism, terrorism and militancy which is an anathema to stability," he said.

Under the third imperative, Najib said a permanent solution to the problems of indigenous Muslim minorities must be found such as in the Philippines, Thailand and Myanmar.

"These Muslims should be made to understand that they must live under the current

national governments. They must recognise the true responsibilities within the current nation-states and contribute the utmost to the moral and socio-economic strengths of these nations," he said.

On the other hand, he said, a degree of autonomy, not independence but autonomy of religion, culture and education should be granted to them.

"And we would like to see that as a way forward, Malaysia will continue to play its part as you know we brokered the signing of the Framework Agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)."

Describing a huge breakthrough was achieved as generations of conflict had ended, he said southern Philippines was peaceful today.

"Although there was an unexpected small invasion, above all, it's a peaceful region and we are optimistic that a peace solution framework will be successful as we move forward.

"It is a major breakthrough as well for both sides, played by Malaysia without interfering in another country's internal affairs. We must give time for the peaceful negotiation to succeed," he said.

He said peace was worth investing, spending time and efforts in and it was a true Islamic way forward.

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