

**Need For Asean To Address Conflict-Hit Areas - Najib
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MANILA, March 27 (Bernama) -- Following the historic signing of a Malaysia-brokered peace accord for southern Philippines Thursday, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has expressed hope that Asean would have addressed trouble spots in this region by the time Asean Community 2015 comes into being.

"We must ensure that all areas that have become areas of conflict no longer continue to be in conflict but strive to find a political solution.

"This is so that when Asean is declared a community, it will truly portray the image of a region that is truly peaceful and progressive," the prime minister told Malaysian media after witnessing the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement (CAB) on the Bangsamoro here.

The peace agreement between the Philippine government (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) seeks the creation of the self-governing political entity called Bangsamoro that will have greater political and economic powers.

The new entity will replace the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao in accordance with the Bangsamoro Basic Law to be passed by the Philippine Congress and ratified by the affected populace.

Najib said Kuala Lumpur hoped that the momentous pact, hammered out following arduous negotiations spanning 17 years between GPH and MILF, would result in a more peaceful and prosperous southern Philippines that may well benefit people living across the border in places like Sabah.

Malaysia came on board the peace process in 2001.

"The spill over effects (of peace) will continue to be felt, more so by Malaysians particularly in Sabah. They will get to enjoy a situation that is more peaceful. Besides this, economic development that will follow in the area will also have spill over effects in Sabah," said Najib.

The prime minister pointed out that Malaysia had shown a leadership role in the crafting of the CAB.

"It means that Malaysia is acknowledged as a country that's able to help out in conflict resolution, especially in this region.

"It goes to show that we're not only a peace-loving country but also one that's prepared to play an active role in contributing towards the good of our Southeast Asian region," Najib said.

He reckoned that Malaysia's image had been given a boost in the eyes of the international community as a result of its role in the Bangsamoro peace accord.

The prime minister said Malaysia was committed to continuing its role as peace facilitator and part of the International Monitoring Team in southern Philippines.

"Our role will continue until we reach the end, that is the creation of the Bangsamoro government," he said.

He added that Kuala Lumpur was prepared to extend a helping hand in skills development and creating economic opportunities in southern Philippines, including in the field of agriculture.

Najib was accompanied on his working visit to Manila by his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor.

Also in his delegation were Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, Armed Forces Chief Gen Tan Sri Zulkifeli Mohd Zain, as well as senior government officials.

Najib is scheduled to leave Manila tonight after attending a dinner at Malacanang Palace.

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