

**Najib's Proposal For Fourth Asean Community Pillar Hailed
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 8 (Bernama) -- The proposal by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak for Asean to create a fourth community pillar to address cross-sectoral issues affecting the region has been hailed as timely by several academicians.

They said it would provide the association with a more dynamic platform to face current complex and non-traditional challenges more effectively.

Dr Azhari-Karim, a former diplomat and former associate professor of Universiti Sains Malaysia and a foreign policy analyst, said the proposed fourth pillar was important as cross-sectoral issues such as the environment were linked to bigger issues such as food and energy which were seen as disproportionate among the Asean countries.

"For example, the environment issue has been discussed, but at the national level and not in a comprehensive manner. When we attend international forums, they want to see the issue from the regional angle, not from a national perspective," he told Bernama when approached at the National Colloquium on Malaysia's Chairmanship of Asean 2015, here.

In this connection, he said, it was important for Asean to establish a specific co-ordinating body to address new challenges such as the environment which, unless tackled, could lead to adverse consequences for the region.

Najib, when delivering his keynote address at the colloquium, suggested that Asean, in facing the challenges ahead, should consider creating a fourth community pillar to deal with important cross-sectoral issues such as the environment and governance.

"Only then, in my view, can we have a focused discussion on critical issues such as climate change and the haze problem," he had said.

The current three Asean community pillars are political and security co-operation, economic integration and socio-cultural co-operation.

Prof Dr Mohamad Abu Bakar, lecturer in the Department of International and Strategic Studies at Universiti Malaya, said he was optimistic that the proposal would be well-received by all quarters because issues such as the environment transcended political sensitivities.

He said the time had come to set up a special body related to safeguarding the environment in the

region to ensure that the future generations inherited a healthy environment.

Principle Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnic Studies of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, said the proposal augured well with Asean's aspiration and readiness to take on a more significant role in the world stage.

He said that beside the environment and governance, other critical issues such as migration and cross-border human trafficking should also be emphasised as members states could no longer take a 'soft approach' to resolve them.

"Asean beyond 2015 should also take into account the post-development agenda of the Millennium Development Goals and the post Rio+20 frameworks which, among others, emphasise human capital development, gender equality, health and human rights," he said.

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