

## **Socio-Cultural Diversity Advantage To Malaysia As ASEAN Chairman**

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**By Rashidah Abdul Rahim**

MELAKA, March 28 (Bernama) -- The socio-cultural diversity of the people of Malaysia can provide the edge for it to become a successful ASEAN chairman, said a delegate to the 13th ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Conference here.

Singapore's Social and Family Development Ministry Communications and International Relations Division director Richard Tan Kok Tong said Malaysia has been successful in becoming a great nation by using its socio-cultural diversity as the backbone to develop the nation.

As such, he said Malaysia, as ASEAN chairman, is capable of becoming an example and reflect ASEAN itself which is capable of becoming successful with its socio-cultural diversity as the bedrock to take the association to the highest level.

"The selection of Malaysia (as ASEAN chairman) is the best platform to reflect the stability of ASEAN's socio-cultural diversity itself, whereby we see Malaysia is capable of being successful with the wholeness of the socio-cultural diversity of its populace.

"I am confident Malaysia can do it (as ASEAN chairman lead the grouping to greater heights)," Tan, who spoke fluent Bahasa Malaysia, told Bernama on the sidelines of the the 13th ASCC conference chaired by Malaysia which ended here yesterday.

It was participated by Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

This year Malaysia took over as ASEAN chairman from Myanmar at an important juncture whereby the formation of the ASEAN Community is poised to become a reality by the end of the year.

Tan said the organisation of the 13th ASCC Conference here also gave the opportunity to the delegates to see for themselves the advantage of the socio-cultural diversity in further prospering Malaysia.

"The friendliness of the people, history, culture and traditions in Malaysia we can see for ourselves in Melaka, in fact the diversity of language and cuisines in this state reflects the people in ASEAN nations themselves," he said.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's Tourism and Culture Ministry secretary-general Datuk Dr Ong Hong Peng said this advantage was a boon to strengthen people-to-people relations in ASEAN.

"By becoming ASEAN chairman with this socio-cultural diversity, it also gives the opportunity to Malaysia to develop ties in various sectors including tourism with numerous

nations via the member nations involved," said Ong.

He said the selection of Malaysia as ASEAN chairman also indirectly impacted positively on the national tourism sector in the future.

"This year is Malaysia Festivals Year (MyFest) and with the holding of various conferences and also ASEAN meeting in this country, will indirectly enable us to promote the tourism sector via the existing cultures and heritages," he said.

Philippines Undersecretary for Policy and Plans, Group Department of Social Welfare and Development, Florita R. Villar believed the socio-cultural diversity in Malaysia will play a vital role in achieving 2025 ASCC Community vision.

"This meeting gives us an opportunity to discuss more about what we want to see in ASEAN 10 years from now especially regarding our socio-cultural matters, so Malaysia is the best chairman (of ASEAN) because they have expertise (in socio-culture).

"We are really grateful that our friends from Malaysia and also other countries are really helping us share what should be incorporated in the 2025 ASCC Community plan," she said.

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