

**#ASEAN: Malaysia Wants An ASEAN Community That Is More Politically Cohesive - Najib
Bernama
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PUTRAJAYA, April 23 (Bernama) -- Malaysia wants an ASEAN Community that is more politically cohesive apart from creating an economic atmosphere that is more integrated, said Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

In addition, the Prime Minister said as the chairman of ASEAN this year, Malaysia would work towards better social and cultural development among the 10 member countries in ASEAN.

"We want to translate this based on the ASEAN Community blueprint. We can do this and at the same time must ensure the security and stability of the region," he said in an interview with Bernama ahead of the 26th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi on April 26 and 27.

"We see ASEAN as community not internally only, but also ASEAN's relations with outside powers, especially the superpowers are also important because the South China Sea and the Straits of Melaka are two vital and strategic waterways," he said.

Najib said the significance of ASEAN was not only in the context of ASEAN itself but also in a wider context.

Malaysia, he said, had put forth the ASEAN theme 'Our People, Our Community, Our Vision' based on its People-Centred ASEAN vision because it wanted to focus on the people in the grouping.

"So, when we focus on the people, we must communicate with them so that they understand and appreciate the significance of ASEAN in the overall macro context and understanding as an individual.

"For example, visiting (ASEAN countries) without visa, it is significant to the individual," he said.

"If we are exporters, we can export to the 10 ASEAN countries without tariff barriers. It means that we look at the bigger market.

"Apart from that, in our capability to work as professionals, we could be transferred to other ASEAN countries. If we are a corporate body, we could invest in ASEAN, set up branches in the region," he said.

Najib said Malaysia could also try to ensure the community or certain groups in ASEAN be given more attention especially businessmen or entrepreneurs.

"That is why we have MaGIC (Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre), a centre

to develop entrepreneurial activities which could benefit ASEAN," he said.

Therefore, Najib said Malaysia should also focus on youths as the group would be instrumental in the continuity of ASEAN in future.

Apart from youths, he said the leadership of non-governmental organisations, civil society groups as well as members of Parliament could also play their roles in expanding the significance of ASEAN to various levels of society in the bloc.

In this regard, Najib placed hopes that the ASEAN Summit this time would create its own history and leave an indelible mark on ASEAN as a regional body when it is declared as an economic community this year.

Asked on the rationale for Malaysia to hold the 26th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi, Najib said it was arranged so as to inject differentiation as well as experience for all delegates and leaders present.

He said the ASEAN Summit preliminary sessions needed to be held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC) in Kuala Lumpur to enable delegates present focus fully on the conference taking place.

"This is because when we hold it in Kuala Lumpur, it would not only be the focus of the whole country but also at the regional and international levels that it is easier for them to focus," he said.

On the selection of Langkawi, the Prime Minister said: "I proposed holding the (leaders) retreat at Langkawi as the environment in Langkawi is different."

"The situation is more relaxed, hence we can exchange ideas in a more informal atmosphere with the hope that we can further strengthen relations between ASEAN leaders. In addition, I also intend to promote Langkawi as a major tourist destination in the region."

ASEAN was set up on Aug 8 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, and was expanded to include Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

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