

**#ASEAN: Success Of ASEAN Integration Relies On Peoples' Acceptance - Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 26 (Bernama) -- ASEAN regional integration can only advance when the people of all the 10-member states are fully involved in the process and invested in its outcome.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the people of ASEAN must feel that they belong to the grouping.

"They must feel that they are not just part of ASEAN, but that they are ASEAN and its future, is their future," he said in his speech at the Gala Dinner in honour of ASEAN Head of States/Government here, Sunday night.

Najib and wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor hosted the dinner in conjunction with the 26th Malaysian-chaired ASEAN Summit, which began today.

Also present was Brunei Darussalam's Sultan, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo, Laos' Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong, Myanmar's President U Thein Sein, Philippines President Benigno S.Aquino III, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsein Loong, Thailand's Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha and Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, as well as ASEAN Secretary-General Le Luong Minh.

The prime minister said there had been many efforts by the governments in realising the integration through various agreements, treaties, communiques, statements and declarations.

These, he said, had shown impressive progress and created an infrastructure for the regional integration.

"However, the instruments we have adopted will be of limited effect if people do not directly benefit and feel that they are directly benefiting from them," he added.

Thus, Najib said during the Summit tomorrow, interface sessions had been included to enable ASEAN leaders to meet with four different groups, namely youth, civil society organisations, business groups and parliamentarians.

He drove home the point that under Malaysia's chairmanship, more people-centered programmes have been arranged throughout the year, including the ASEAN Young Leaders Summit, the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit, the 1ASEAN Entrepreneurship Summit, the ASEAN SME Showcase and Conference and others.

Thanking the members states for their cooperation in helping Malaysia in organising the events, Najib noted that "Go ASEAN", a brand new travel channel to showcase the very best

of ASEAN would also be launched.

"At the practical level, Malaysia is instituting programmes which will directly benefit our next generation of leaders.

"We are creating the MTCP-ASEAN Masters Scholarship 2015 programme, which enables students from ASEAN countries to study in well-established Malaysian public universities and thereafter, make significant contributions to their own countries on return," he said.

On another note, Najib pointed out that ASEAN's growing importance and the dynamism of its young and increasingly well-educated population were generating ever-greater interest, not just in the region but in the world.

"We are engaging, as ASEAN, with neighbours and countries further afield. Our convening power is acknowledged, and more and more states - the established powers and those rising to take their place on the international stage - are knocking on our door.

"A more integrated ASEAN provides new opportunities, both for us and for others - and the rest of the world has taken notice," he noted.

Najib said as the integration is for the benefit of all, so is the need to maintain and strengthen rules-based approaches to inter-state relations in the region.

"This effort must be an ongoing strategic imperative, given the geo-political realities both in the region and the wider area," he added.

To brighten up the evening, a musical, singing and dance performances were staged, including Malaysia's renowned "Mak Yong", which has been recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a world heritage item.

The Gala dinner also featured 50 youth percussionists from ASEAN countries.

Themed, "Our People, Our Community, Our Vision", Malaysia's vision throughout the chairmanship is the creation of a "people-centred ASEAN" involving all sectors of society in the groupings activities.

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