

Najib asks region's parliamentarians to highlight Asean benefits
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Datuk Seri Najib Razak said Asean parliamentarians need to play a more proactive role in highlighting the benefits that people can gain from a people-centred and more inclusive Asean in their respective countries.

The prime minister said they should leverage on their direct contact with voters as well as in parliament to convey what Asean stood for towards the creation of a regional community that was politically cohesive, economically robust and socially responsible.

Najib noted that the 10-member Asean had formulated hundreds of agreements, treaties, communiques, statements and declarations.

"But these instruments will be of limited effect if people don't directly benefit from them, or are not aware of the tangible advantages that come from us being Asean," he said in his keynote address at the 36th General Assembly of the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (Aipa) today.

The September 6 to 12 gathering carries the theme 'engaging a people-oriented, people-centred Asean community towards inclusiveness'.

Drawing the audience deeper into the theme, Najib drove home the point that the people's participation in the establishment by end 2015 of a unified Asean community was crucial for it to be one they could relate to, feel part of and owned.

"The benefits of the Asean community are very real. Freer movement of goods, services, skilled labour and capital will bind the region's economies closer," he said.

Harmonising and streamlining product standards will increase competitiveness while gradual tariff reductions implemented since 2007 had already reduced many prices, the prime minister said.

"Asean integration will only be truly successful when the people of our 10 nations are fully involved in the process and invested in its outcome," he said.

Najib said that part of making Asean people-oriented, people-centred and inclusive was to make certain that protection of human rights and improvements in quality of life were extended to everyone.

"Across Asean we must reach out to the vulnerable and marginalised, promote gender equality and ensure justice and fairness for all our citizens," he said, adding that one of those rights was the right to clean air.

Najib pointed out that Aipa, formerly Aipo (Asean Inter-Parliamentary Organisation) – an organisation at its inception in 1977 before transforming itself into an assembly in

2007 – had done a sterling job in supporting the aims of Asean and helping putting them into action at the national level.

He took the opportunity to announce that Asean was taking steps to further formalise and regularise meetings, particularly the interface between Asean and Aipa.

"The two secretariats will continue to build the relationship through joint activities and develop mechanisms and indicators for effective reviewing and monitoring.

"This is essential to support the implementation of Asean policies and agreements, and will support cohesiveness in the decision-making process," he said at the event attended by over 300 delegates from Asean parliaments.

In attendance were Aipa president and Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia and Senate president Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang. – Bernama, September 8, 2015.

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