

**Malaysia To Continue Pressing For People-Centred ASEAN – Najib
Bernama
Nov 19, 2015**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 19 (Bernama) -- Having made a people-centred ASEAN as one of the priorities of Malaysia's 2015 chairmanship of the grouping, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Kuala Lumpur will continue to push for the continuance of the approach in the coming years.

The prime minister acknowledged that the region had to do much more to ensure that its population of over 600 million people felt that ASEAN was part of their lives.

"We want ASEAN to be close to their hearts, and we have a long way to go to achieve that.

"And that's one of the reasons why during Malaysia's chairmanship we wanted to emphasise on a people-centred ASEAN, and we will continue to press that approach in the years to come," he said.

Najib said this in his written response to a series of questions from Bernama in conjunction with the 27th ASEAN Summit and related summits this weekend.

Najib hailed ASEAN's citizens as the greatest strength of the community.

"We believe that allowing them to realise their aspirations...will strengthen and help drive ASEAN on to the next stage of its collective growth," he said.

He cited good governance, transparency, higher standards of living, sustainable development, the empowerment of women and greater opportunity for all as some of the aspirations of the people of ASEAN.

Najib noted that he and his fellow leaders adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on People-Oriented and People-Centred ASEAN at the 26th ASEAN Summit held in Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi in April.

In this regard, he said ASEAN members had undertaken various efforts, both at the national and regional levels, to promote greater and deeper involvement of all sectors of society in ASEAN's work.

Najib revealed that the promotion of rules-based, people-oriented and people-centred community had been incorporated in the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, with a number of measures having been developed and implemented to progress this agenda.

They include the inclusion of ASEAN studies in the curricula of educational institutions of ASEAN members, effective implementation of the ASEAN Lane at international airports, and the promotion of equitable economic development across the region.

"These measures are intended to ensure that all ASEAN citizens from all sectors of society are able to contribute towards and enjoy the benefits of a more integrated and connected community," he said.

The prime minister also spoke about the pessimism that greeted the birth of ASEAN back in 1967, with very few were optimistic that ASEAN would rise and prosper.

"It was predicted that ASEAN would wither...given the complex and unpredictable regional situation (then).

"However, 48 years later, we have proved them wrong. ASEAN is stronger, more cohesive and more prosperous than ever before - and that is good for all of our over 600 million-strong population," he added.

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