

**Q&A Transcript Of Prime Minister With Bernama Inconjunction With 27th ASEAN Summit  
Bernama  
Nov 20, 2015**

**General And Political Questions**

**1. Can you provide a progress update on Malaysia's preparations to host the 27th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits?**

We are ready. Over the past few months, a tremendous amount of work has gone towards preparing for the ASEAN Summit and Related Summits. I have been personally involved as Patron of the National Steering Committee, which consists of twenty sub-committee, and has been overseeing these preparations. We will be welcoming eighteen Heads of State/Government from our fellow ASEAN Member States and ASEAN Dialogue Members, as well as the Secretary General of the United Nations, and I am confident that they will be pleased with the welcome they are accorded.

**2. Can you share with us who are among the Heads of State and Government who have confirmed their participation for the Kuala Lumpur meetings?**

We are expecting ten Heads of State or Government from our fellow ASEAN member states, as well as Heads of Government or State from eight ASEAN dialogue nations and the Secretary General of the United Nations, to attend the summit in Kuala Lumpur. Amongst others; this will include Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, President Barack Obama and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev.

**3. From Malaysia's point of view, what is the significance of the 27th ASEAN Summit?**

2015 has been a significant year for ASEAN. Having had the privilege of chairing ASEAN this year, I can tell you that there is a genuine desire for greater unity amongst the member countries, and we are confident and hopeful that we have set the community on the path to greater cooperation and cohesion.

We have worked with our fellow member states to develop a guideline, a set of documents, which charts how we are going to build this community over the next ten years: ASEAN 2025 - Forging Ahead Together. It will be give me great delight to endorse these documents, along with the other ASEAN leaders, during the summit. Furthermore; to commemorate the formal establishment of the ASEAN Community, we will be signing the 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declarations on the Establishment of the ASEAN Community

a historic and important milestone in the evolution of ASEAN since it was founded in 1967.

**4. What are the major documents which are expected to be issued at the conclusion of the series of meetings in Kuala Lumpur?**

As mentioned earlier, we expect to finalize and sign two key documents:

2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Community and Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together. These are very important agreements that will help further consolidate and strengthen ASEAN as we move towards ever greater cooperation.

In addition, the East Asia Summit will

amongst other agreements - see the adaptation of the EAS Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates and the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the 10th Anniversary of the East Asia Summit to commemorate the 10th year anniversary of the East Asia Summit.

**5. To officially come into being soon, can you share with us your thoughts on the formation of ASEAN Community?**

The creation of the ASEAN Economic Community is the culmination of a journey we started in 2007. Premised on political stability, equitable economic development and social responsibility; it will mark the beginning of a new era that will see the transformation of ASEAN into one of the world's most competitive regions.

Over the past few decades, we have seen some fantastic growth stories around the region, not least in Malaysia. Closer integration amongst ASEAN's member states will allow us to combine our strengths and compete more effectively on the global stage. In doing so, we will be able to deliver meaningful and positive change to the livelihood and well-being of more than 600 million people who call this region home, for instance better healthcare services and improved access to education.

**6. Malaysia has been underlining the importance of a 'people-centred ASEAN'. In your opinion, how far has this materialised as far as the region is concerned and in Malaysia itself? Going forward, how would you like to see this 'people-first' concept be incorporated in ASEAN's post 2015-agenda?**

From the beginning of Malaysia's Chairmanship of ASEAN, we have positioned the creation of a truly 'People-Centered ASEAN' as one of our key priorities. Our people, the citizens of the incredible and vibrant nations that make up ASEAN, are the greatest strength of our community. We believe that allowing them to realize their aspirations - good governance, transparency, higher standards of living, sustainable development, the empowerment of women, and greater opportunity for all

will strengthen and help drive ASEAN on to the next stage of its collective growth.

We are delighted that this has received broad and enthusiastic support from other ASEAN member states and, at the 26th ASEAN Summit that was held last April, my fellow Leaders and I adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on People-Oriented and People-Centred ASEAN. The Declaration, focusing on people and environment for sustainable development in the region, sets the framework for the adoption of the ASEAN Community's Post-2015

integral document. As part of this, ASEAN Member States have undertaken various initiatives and efforts, both at the national and regional levels, to promote greater and deeper involvement of all sectors of society in ASEAN's work.

The promotion of the rules-based, people-oriented, people-centered community has been incorporated in the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and a number of measures have been developed and implemented in order to progress this agenda. This includes the inclusion of ASEAN studies in the curricula of education institutions of ASEAN Member States, the effective implementation of the ASEAN Lane at international airports, and the promotion of equitable economic development across the region to name a few.

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.

**7. What may likely be the major challenges for ASEAN in implementing the ASEAN Community initiative? In your view, what are the pitfalls that should be avoided by ASEAN member states to ensure a successful roll-out of the ASEAN Community?**

Our greatest challenge in creating the ASEAN Economic Community is the fact that there are very few precedents for what we hope to achieve. This is an enormous project; involving ten member states, over 600 million people, and a combined economy that has a GDP of more than 2.57 trillion dollars. Specifically speaking, I believe that the key challenges we will face will be ensuring that regional agreements are translated into locations, ensuring effective coordination amongst the member states and various stakeholders within each, and generating the resources to support the implementation of our programmes and projects.

However, as part of the guidelines entrenched in ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, we have taken a number of measures to pro-actively address these challenges. For instance: we have ensured there is a greater focus towards strengthening ASEAN's institutional capacity and effectiveness; placed special emphasis on promoting ASEAN presence and awareness at the national, regional and international levels; and introduced more rigorous implementation, monitoring and review in the respective ASEAN Community Blueprints 2025.

We are confident that these and the other measures we have introduced will help us overcome any challenges we may face.

**8. What are among the measures that ASEAN could take to assist its lesser developed member states to reap the benefits of the ASEAN Community?**

Let's take poverty as an example.

ASEAN has made considerable progress towards eradicating poverty amongst its member states, for instance, by reducing the proportion of people living on less than USD1.25 per day from 45 per cent in 1990 to 14 per cent in 2010.

However, there remains a lot to do, with a recent study by the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) revealing that there were still 100 million people living in dire poverty in the region

and nearly 200 million, if the threshold income was set at US\$2 per day.

By ensuring deeper regional connectivity, we believe that ASEAN member states will benefit from greater economic growth and be able to attract more investment, all of which will help improve the standard of living for citizens in these countries.

**9. On the contentious issue of the South China Sea, what can be expected at the Kuala Lumpur gathering towards resolving the matter? What is the latest on efforts to formulate the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea?**

As with any issue that has relevance for ASEAN's member states, I think we can expect that recent developments in the South China Sea will come up for discussion. We wish to see peace and harmony in our region, and the security and stability of ASEAN's members is of paramount importance for this to be achieved. I believe that other ASEAN leaders share this view and am hopeful that, with time, any disputes that exist between member states can be resolved in an amicable manner.

With regards to efforts to formulate the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC); senior officials from relevant countries have met on a number of occasions, most recently in Chengdu last month, and consultations have entered a substantive phase. However, whilst progress continues to be made, it may take some time before the COC is officially established.

**10. What is your take on the bid to counter the threats posed by extremist and militant groups in the region? In your opinion, what is/are the approach/approaches that ASEAN should take to address this issue?**

We are unanimous in our belief that there is no place for extremism in our society. Many countries across the region have suffered at the hands of extremists and Malaysia is no different, as is reflected by the barbaric murder of our citizen Bernard Then in the Philippines recently. This has given me greater determination than ever to ensure that all possible measures are taken to defeat not only the militant groups that have arisen in the region but also the extremist ideology they use.

We recently convened a Special ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kuala Lumpur, following which a Chairman Statement was issued which called for ASEAN Member States to speak up against and reject extremism and support moderation in line with the Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of

Moderates adopted on 27 April 2015; and to counter radicalization and violent extremism in all forms and manifestations that lead to terrorism - including the prevention of radicalization, financing, recruitment and mobilization of individuals into terrorist groups. Furthermore, Malaysia will be hosting an International Conference on Deradicalization and Countering Violent Extremism between 25-26 January 2016 in Kuala Lumpur. This conference will not only involve ASEAN Member States but also other countries namely Australia, China, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and the United States.

However, words by themselves are not enough, and I wish to assure our citizens that we will be looking at concrete measures that can be taken to counter the spread of radicalization and extremism in a holistic manner.

**11. On the problem of irregular movement of migrants affecting ASEAN countries, what do you think is necessary to address this?**

This issue is of urgent concern not just to ASEAN, but also to the international community. It involves people smuggling and human trafficking syndicates preying on vulnerable people seeking better lives for themselves and their families. A global effort by all countries is necessary to break the vicious cycle of exploitation.

We believe that tackling the root causes is vital, and Malaysia will certainly do its part in addressing this complex and tragic crisis.

I am pleased to be able to announce that the ASEAN Leaders will be signing the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) at the 27th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits. This will help ASEAN in its efforts and signals our determination to alleviate the terrible suffering people-trafficking causes.

**12. The haze problem attributed to land-clearing activities in a neighbouring country has significantly improved. In this regard, what should be the priority among ASEAN countries in putting a stop to such an environment disaster once and for all?**

The ASEAN region, and particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, have been badly affected by this in the past two months. The priority now is to enhance cooperation in developing and implementing measures to prevent, monitor and mitigating haze pollution. We need to develop early warning systems, exchange information, and be ready to assist each other.

At the end of October, the ASEAN Ministers of Environment endorsed Indonesia's intention to host the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control. This should ensure more efficient and quicker responses when fires spread in future, and Malaysia will continue working towards ASEAN's vision of a Haze-Free region by 2020.

**13. United States President Barack Obama is scheduled to be in Malaysia for the ASEAN-US Summit and the East Asia Summit. In your opinion, what is the significance**

**of his planned presence here and what are your expectations of the ASEAN-US Summit?**

The ASEAN-US Dialogue Relations were established in 1977, and they have grown significantly to cover a wide range of areas of cooperation, from political-security and economic to the socio-cultural.

At the 3rd ASEAN-US Summit and the 10th East Asia Summit, President Obama is expected to announce the new strategic partnership between the United States and ASEAN. We welcome the president's efforts to deepen ties with ASEAN under the broader US policy of rebalancing to the Asia Pacific.

**14. ASEAN is also scheduled to convene a summit with China as well as the 10th East Asia Summit. What do you hope can be achieved at these summits?**

This will be the 18th ASEAN-China Summit, and Premier Li Keqiang is also expected to attend the 10th East Asia Summit. China has made clear her continued support for ASEAN's central role in the evolving regional architecture, and these will be opportunities to discuss ways we can further strengthen relations and talk about the maintenance of peace, security and stability in the region.

**15. Detractors of ASEAN continue to accuse it of being an elitist body, and say that not many people feel a sense of belonging to the ASEAN Community. Are these criticisms justified? APSCD II**

When the five Foreign Ministers from Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, signed the Bangkok Declaration in 1967, very few were optimistic that ASEAN would rise and prosper. It was predicted that ASEAN would wither, just like its predecessors SEATO, ASA and Maphilindo, given the complex and unpredictable regional situation. 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 over 600 million-strong population.

However, it is true that we need to do much more to ensure that our peoples feel that ASEAN is a part of their lives. We want ASEAN to be close to their hearts, and we have a long way to go to achieve that. But that is one of the reasons why during Malaysia's chairmanship we wanted to emphasise a people-centred ASEAN, and we will continue to press that approach in the years to come.

**16. ASEAN is seen to be lacking in terms of helping member states face difficulties like floods and other natural calamities, with countries from outside the region being much faster in extending aid to affected countries and communities. Do you agree with such a statement?**

In general, since the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami ASEAN has had the necessary mechanisms to jointly respond to emergencies. The ASEAN Coordination Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management and the ASEAN-Emergency Response and Assessment Team are there to extend aid to affected countries and communities, and we have a commitment to establishing ourselves as a disaster-resilient Community by the end of this year.

ASEAN mobilised much faster during Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the floods in Thailand in 2011 and Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. We were quick to assist victims in cooperation with regional and international aid agencies. But we are constantly trying to improve too.

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