

**Asean Reborn As New Force In Asia Pacific And Beyond – Najib
Bernama
Nov 21, 2015**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 21 (Bernama) -- ASEAN is now ready to be reborn as one community, taking its place on the world's stage as a new force in the Asia Pacific and beyond, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today.

As the grouping embarks on a journey to become a community, he declared that it was ASEAN'S historic duty to ensure that when the challenge arose, the people and governments of Southeast Asia were equal to the task.

"This is ASEAN's time, this is our time. ASEAN can and should play a major role in shaping this Asian century, and work with our partners across the continents to shape a world of prosperity, peace and openness," he said in his opening address at the 27th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits here today.

Najib also called on the grouping to act more as ASEAN internationally, making the pact far stronger than as individual nations, that others would recognise, respect its rise and what has been achieved.

Within the region, he said, the grouping needs to cooperate to find solutions to environmental problems such as the haze, natural disasters including floods and earthquakes and crises of migration.

The prime minister pointed out that growth in the region had been impressive with ASEAN increasingly seen not only as integral to the global economic and security architecture, but also as one of tremendous opportunities.

"Allow me to suggest that you close your eyes for a moment, and imagine you were living in this region today, without ASEAN. What would it be like?

"Clearly the answer is, we would not be what we are today without ASEAN which has more than served its purpose and has been a great success," said Najib.

With over 240 million Muslims, 140 million Buddhists, 130 million Christians and millions of Hindus, Sikhs, Confucians, Taoists and others, as well as numerous different ethnicities, Southeast Asia was once referred to as "the Balkans of the Orient".

"We are a highly diverse collection of faiths and ethnicities. We have had to work together and overcome our differences. But in transcending them, we have become a unique example of how ten different nations can form a shared vision," Najib said.

Najib urged member states to do more, owing it to the people, by committing themselves to specific deliverables and making good on their promises.

"It is imperative that we have solid progress to report on, the next time we meet in Vientiane," he added.

He cited for example, the need to ensure there are special lanes for ASEAN citizens at every international port and airports, while celebrating ASEAN food in cafes, roadside stalls, food courts and supermarkets.

"We should promote more ASEAN festivals and cross-cultural ties and ensure that no student leaves school without having been taught about our history," Najib said.

He also outlined the necessary political will, as well as values that are deeply rooted in the emotion and culture of the people of ASEAN, as elements that continue to bind the pact and become the foundation to the path being forged together.

He said this was how India's Mahatma Gandhi as well South Africa's Nelson Mandela and America's Martin Luther King won the hearts and minds of their enemies, and resolved the conflicts and injustices they were fighting against.

"They won by transforming their foes into friends," he said, adding that there was nothing wimpish about moderation.

The concept of moderation, he said, was deeply embedded in the ASEAN Way, and one which was close to Malaysia where its unique mixture of faiths and ethnicities had strengthened rather than divided its citizens.

Still on the scourge of terrorism, Najib said the perpetrators of cowardly and barbaric acts did not represent any race, religion and creed, nor should they be allowed to claim to do so.

"They're terrorists and should be confronted as such, with the full force of the law," the prime minister said, as he called for vigilance against a threat that was very real in the region.

"The thoughts and prayers of us all - Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and people of others faiths - are with the people of Russia, France, Lebanon and Mali as well as with the families of last month's bombing in Ankara, and with the people of Syria and Iraq whose suffering has endured for so long," he said.

"We pray that a more moderate and peaceful world will one day consign such outrages and murderous ideologies to the past," he said.

Malaysia, he said, was ready to provide any help towards eliminating what he described as this new evil that blasphemed Islam.

-- BERNAMA

Copyright © 2015 BERNAMA

<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/newsindex.php?id=1192010>