

**Opening Address By Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, Prime Minister Of Malaysia
Bernama
Nov 21, 2015**

OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 27TH ASEAN SUMMIT AND RELATED SUMMITS ON 21 NOVEMBER 2015 (SATURDAY), AT 9.00 AM AT THE PLENARY HALL, LEVEL 1, KUALA LUMPUR CONVENTION CENTRE (KLCC)

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Good Morning

Your Majesties,

ASEAN Heads of State and Government,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. On behalf of the Government and the people of Malaysia, may I warmly welcome your Majesties, all ASEAN leaders and everyone present to Kuala Lumpur and to the Opening Ceremony of the 27th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits.

Honoured guests, colleagues and friends,

2. I was going to begin by talking to you about the momentous steps we in ASEAN are about to embark upon. But the events of recent days and weeks have cast a shadow over us all. 170 dead after the attacks in Paris and Beirut. 224 lives taken in the bombing of a Russian passenger jet over the Sinai desert. Just this week, an innocent Malaysian beheaded in the southern Philippines. And yesterday, hostages taken and lives lost in Bamako, Mali.

3. There cannot be a person in this hall who has not been shocked and shaken by the sickening disregard for human life and the devastation visited on families and communities. Our countries are in mourning. We all share in this grief.

4. The perpetrators of these cowardly and barbaric acts do not represent any race, religion or creed, nor should we allow them to claim to do so. They are terrorists and should be confronted as such, with the full force of the law.

5. Malaysia stands ready to provide any help and support that we can, and be assured that we stand with you against this new evil that blasphemes against the name of Islam.

6. We are ever vigilant against a threat that is very real in our region. Local militants and groups, such as Abu Sayyaf, have sworn allegiance to the so-called Islamic State. It was they who cruelly murdered our countryman, Bernard Then, on Tuesday.

7. We must recognise that problems of extremism today require new solutions.

8. Understandably, many will want to fight the so-called Islamic State out of the lands they have stolen from millions of Syrian and Iraqis. But a military solution alone will not be enough to defeat those who see peace, and want to cause war. Those who see order and civilisation, and wish for nothing but mayhem and death. Who see prosperity and culture, and burn to bring desolation and despair.

9. It is the ideology propagated by these extremists that is the cause of this sadistic violence; and in this time of tragedy, we must not lose sight of the fact that the ideology itself must be exposed as the lie that it is - and vanquished. For it is not Islamic. It cannot be.

10. It states clearly in the Holy Quran that if anyone wrongly takes a life, "it shall be as if he had killed all mankind". Suicide - under any circumstances, never mind suicide bombing that kills innocents - is likewise a terrible sin. In the Hadith, it is recorded that the Prophet Muhammad said that God forbids Paradise to anyone who takes their own life - let alone the lives of innocents.

11. We should examine why any should be misguided enough to follow this perverted ideology - what is their motivation? But let us be clear: it is an utter travesty of a religion of peace, justice and moderation.

12. More than ever, it is that last concept, moderation, that we are in dire need of around the world. Moderation, or wasatiyyah, is at the heart of Islam. It is a Quranic injunction that no Muslim can disobey. But moderation does not belong only to us. It has been the locomotive of the non-violent approach to solving conflict throughout history.

13. This is how Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King won the hearts and minds of their enemies, and resolved the conflicts and injustices that they each were fighting against. They won by transforming their foes into friends. It can take a heroic effort.

14. When Jesus, or Nabi Isa, as Muslims call one of our greatest prophets, said: "Blessed are the peacemakers", he was praising those who took on the hardest of labours. There is nothing easy or wimpish about moderation.

15. It is a concept that is deeply embedded in the ASEAN Way, and one which is close to our hearts here in Malaysia, where our unique mixture of faiths and ethnicities could have divided us; but instead our diversity has strengthened us.

16. The thoughts and prayers of us all - Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and people of other faiths - are with the peoples of Russia, France, Lebanon and Mali, as they are with the families of the victims of last month's bombing in Ankara, Turkey, and with the peoples of Syria and Iraq, whose suffering has endured for so long.

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

18. Let us begin that work today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. You are all here in Kuala Lumpur at a historic moment for our ten nation association. Tomorrow, we will formally declare the establishment of the ASEAN Community on 31st December 2015, marking the culmination of a decades-long effort to integrate, to cohere and to forge ahead together.

20. It is a day that we have all been waiting for. It is a day that we - ASEAN - can be proud of:

21. We have maintained the high ambitions we set for ourselves in the three community blueprints - economic, political-security, and socio-cultural.

22. Our growth has been impressive. And ASEAN is increasingly seen not only as integral to the global economic and security architecture, but also as a region of tremendous opportunity.

23. As the CEO of a major international banking group put it earlier this year, "There's a giant in Asia, shifting the tectonic plates of manufacturing, trade, services and the global economy. ASEAN is the next horizon."

But, ladies and gentlemen,

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

25. Would we be living in a region as peaceful as it is today? Would we be enjoying the same standard of living? Would our combined GDP have grown to 2.6 trillion US dollars last year, a near 80% increase in 7 years? Would we have the same levels of connectivity? Would we be talked about as the most dynamic and promising region on earth?

26. Clearly the answer is no - we would not be what we are today without ASEAN. ASEAN more than served its purpose and been a great success.

27. 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".

28. We were, wrote one scholar, a "cultural and political fault zone". Given this diversity, he continued, "wars of separation should emerge as a natural consequence."

29. And half a century ago, we were indeed a group of developing nations in a region riven by conflict and instability.

30. That could have continued. Look around the world, and you will find plenty of countries that greeted the dawn of independence gladly, only to taste the bitter ashes of disappointment when they found themselves, decades on, mired in poverty, ignorance and neglect, and swept up in wars brought on by ego-driven leaders, which had nothing to do with the national interest.

31. Or we could, in Southeast Asia, have emulated those developed nations whose taste for competition has often extended to a form of economic warfare, elevating the principle of "survival of the fittest" into a savage battle for wealth and primacy - believing that for one to win, another must fail.

32. Instead, we did something remarkable. We chose another way. In 1967 our forefathers formed a new association that has grown to our ten nations today. And we have advanced, and risen together, the ASEAN way.

33. We have stressed community and consensus-building, over the excesses of individualism and the seeking of selfish objectives. Non-violence over confrontation. Moderation over extremism. Showing respect, not just to our friends but also to our foes, for we know there is no virtue in humiliation. Peace-seeking and peace-building, instead of fanning the flames of conflict and war.

34. We are a highly diverse collection of faiths and ethnicities. We have had to work together and overcome our differences.

35. But in transcending them, we have become a unique example of how ten different nations can form a shared vision. Of how we are many, but we are one as ASEAN.

36. And I believe that the reason we have been able to do that is not just due to the necessary political will. It is because the values that I just mentioned are rooted deeply in the emotions and culture of our peoples. More than treaties and summits, they are what bind ASEAN together, and they are the foundation for our confidence in the path we are forging together.

Ladies and gentlemen,

37. I have talked about the ASEAN way, and of the ideals and values our peoples share. But we should admit that we have a challenge. Making everyone across our nations - from the fisherman and the farmer, to the foreign exchange dealer in a shining new tower - feel in their hearts that they are not just part of ASEAN, but that they are ASEAN, is not easy.

38. How do we make ASEAN something that touches the everyday lives of our peoples? How do we make our citizens feel, directly, personally, that the possibilities of the

Community we will establish tomorrow are theirs? Too often, I'm afraid, ASEAN can seem remote.

39. That is why I am glad that today we will honour ten individuals and organisations for their community-building efforts at the inaugural ASEAN People's Awards.

40. Similarly, I am delighted that in conjunction with the 27th ASEAN Summit, Malaysia is hosting the 1ASEAN Entrepreneurship Summit, a week-long assembly of 15,000 young entrepreneurs from all over ASEAN, some of whom are with us today in this hall.

41. Earlier this year Malaysia launched GOASEAN TV, a new English-language, ASEAN-focused travel channel that will serve as a platform for ASEAN member countries to jointly promote tourism in ASEAN - both to the world and to each other.

42. And just yesterday we established the ASEAN Micro and SME Growth Accelerator Exchange for SME finance.

43. This is a practical, tangible example of ASEAN making a real difference to the hard-working companies that are the backbone of our economies.

44. We must do more, and now we are about to become a Community, we owe it to our people to commit ourselves to specific deliverables and making good on our promises. It is imperative that we have solid progress to report on next time we meet in Vientiane.

45. There are some low hanging fruit we can focus on. For example, we should ensure that there are special lanes for ASEAN citizens at every international port, road and airport. We should have banners celebrating ASEAN food in cafes, warongs, food courts and supermarkets.

46. We need to prioritise the launch of the ASEAN Business Travel Card, and strengthen ASEAN internship programmes. We should promote more ASEAN festivals and cross-cultural ties, and ensure that no student leaves school without having been taught about our history.

47. We need that single market and production base we talk about. We need the free movement of goods, services, skilled labour, capital and investments. At the moment non-tariff barriers, which affect daily life and employment across our nations, are too extensive.

48. We should act more as ASEAN within our region. We need to cooperate to find solutions to environmental problems such as the haze, natural disasters including floods and earthquakes, and crises of migration.

49. On that note, I am delighted that later this morning we will sign the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

50. And we should act more as ASEAN internationally, in a way that makes it plain that together we are far stronger than as individual nations, and that others around the world recognise and respect our rise and what we have achieved so far.

51. That includes maintaining peace, security and stability in the South China Sea.

52. We stress the importance of resolving disputes through peaceful means, in accordance with international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We call on all parties to exercise self-restraint, and avoid actions that would complicate or escalate tension.

53. That is the ASEAN way.

But, ladies and gentlemen,

54. Let us not forget the immense practical benefits our association has already brought us. For on the economic front, ASEAN has made a direct financial difference to hundreds of millions.

55. The ASEAN Free Trade Area, or AFTA, has reduced tariffs to zero or near zero. This has reduced the prices of countless goods, and means our citizens have more money to spend on their families. Without AFTA, our firms would find it harder to access each others' markets.

56. Without ASEAN, unemployment would be higher. The overall rate among our ten nations is a comparatively low 3.3 percent - which economists attribute not just to countries, but to ASEAN attracting substantial flows of foreign direct investment.

57. Without ASEAN, our citizens would not enjoy visa-free travel through nine out of our ten member states.

58. Without ASEAN, and the Mutual Recognition Agreements we have put in place, our professionals would find it far harder to work in each other's countries.

59. And with further liberalisation and integration come still greater prizes: it is estimated that the measures we are implementing under the ASEAN Economic Community will raise overall GDP in ASEAN by seven percent by 2025. That will be a gain for our economies in the hundreds of billions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

60. At this Summit we will also be signing the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, which incorporates the ASEAN Community Vision.

61. This is about how we build upon and deepen the integration process to realise a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN Community in which we seek to

narrow the development gap. It is an ambitious document - but ambition is part of our heritage.

62. Our forefathers were ambitious when they signed the Bangkok Declaration that set up ASEAN. Our predecessors were ambitious when they expanded the association, up to our present ten nations. And it was ambitious, too, to plan for ASEAN to become what we will establish tomorrow.

63. That is: a body with One Vision, and One identity; an association that will be reborn as One Community, ready to take its place on the world stage as a new force in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

Ladies and gentlemen,

64. Malaysia has been honoured to chair ASEAN in this momentous year, and I suggest that after tomorrow we refer to ourselves as the ASEAN Community, a proud new name to mark this significant evolution in our association.

65. 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. A world in which the carnage wrought by terrorists has been replaced by tolerance, moderation and a true recognition of our common humanity.

66. It is our historic duty to ensure that when the challenge arose, the peoples and governments of Southeast Asia were equal to the task.

67. On that note, it is my pleasure and honour to hereby declare the 27th ASEAN Summit open.

Thank you.

-- BERNAMA

Copyright © 2015 BERNAMA

<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/newsindex.php?id=1192001>