

**Muslims in ASEAN Should Unified Ummah to Speak as One – Najib
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PUTRAJAYA, Dec 7 (Bernama) -- With over 240 million Muslims in ASEAN, Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the region should be a unified congregation of the Ummah in Southeast Asia and speak as one to the world concerning Islam's moderation and tolerance.

In these dark times, he said, the message that Islam was a religion of peace, justice and inclusivity needed to be spread far and wide.

"We are uniquely placed to do so," he said at the launch of the ASEAN Mosque Festival (AMF) here today in a speech read by Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Ashraf Wajdi Dusuki.

Najib emphasised: "For that is the story of Islam in our region. It is one that we must repeat both to ourselves and to others, so that they do not fall for the falsehoods of the terrorists who blaspheme the name of Islam, and who have brought death and destruction to so many.

"It is a story that we must actively rediscover, by relearning our history, and drawing on the unique scholarship and traditions that have been developed in our part of the world, and are still being developed today."

On the inaugural AMF, Najib said it was aimed to redefine, support and enlarge on the roles of mosques in societies, to overcome misconceptions about religious, and provide a more in-depth understanding of the different faiths that 625 million people follow.

Najib said the mosque as the centre for all Muslims was not only a place for worship but also for education and at the heart of communities that helped bring people together - and not just Muslims.

"The Muslims of ASEAN are raising and reinvigorating our houses of worship and ensuring that they are at the centre of communities, helping to promote harmony and friendship between all," he said.

Themed 'Knowledge, Ukhuwah and Understanding', the one-day conference gathered intellectuals, Islamic scholars and ASEAN community of all races and cultural backgrounds to provide strategic in-sights on the benefits and opportunities that mosques can create.

Najib said AMF was where all scholars from 10 ASEAN states would meet in the spirit of tolerance, peace, cooperation and mutual appreciation, and where representatives of all the major religions share their collective wisdom and teachings.

"There will be opportunities to explore and to learn, and we hope that will deepen understanding and promote peaceful and joyous co-existence. There will be opportunities to challenge, and to ask some hard questions," he said.

As ASEAN Chair, he said, Malaysia was pleased to launch an initiative that aimed to empower the transformational values of the mosque and he was confident that AMF would make a huge difference for the good of all our peoples.

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