

**National Autism Centre an Investment for Country – Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 31 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today he is confident the establishment of the Permata Kurnia national autism centre will be an investment in the provision of early intervention for children with autism.

He said the approach and alternative methods of early intervention for children with autism would be able to reduce the cost of care for a lifetime.

"Early intervention can reduce the cost of care that the country has to bear. I am convinced that this is an investment for the country, not an expenditure," he said when opening the Permata Kurnia Centre in Sentul here.

Najib's wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, who is patron of the Permata programme, Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim and Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Dr Ali Hamsa were also present at the event.

The Prime Minister said the centre provided full-time service for children four to six years of age as a transition to prepare them for mainstream education.

He said he would be proud if children with autism could attend normal school as it would not pose a burden to their parents, and the children would have the opportunity to excel.

Najib said that in the United States, for example, the number of children with autism was 1.5 million and the lifetime cost of care per child was estimated at USD3.2 million (about RM12.3 million).

The RM28-million Permata Kurnia Centre in Sentul cares for about 300 children, having started operations in December last year.

The Prime Minister said Permata had expanded to seven programmes since it was introduced in 2006 and won international recognition. It has been nominated for the Global Good Governance Children's Awards in the 3G Children's Welfare Awards category in London.

Permata would compete with the programmes of three other countries, namely Qatar, the United Kingdom and India, he said.

Najib expressed the hope that the autism centre would spread its wings to the states with teachers dedicated to bringing up successful children.

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