

**Malaysia's Foreign Policies Must Be With National Interest in Mind - Najib
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PUTRAJAYA, Aug 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Malaysia needed a clear break from past approaches as the country's foreign policy should be about building partnerships that benefited the nation and people.

Opening the biennial conference of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) here Thursday, Najib stressed that the national interest should always come before personal political interests.

"We in Malaysia believe in reaching out to other states, regardless of political ideology and system, while maintaining an independent, non-aligned and principled stance in regional and international affairs," he said.

Malaysia, however, did not believe in foreign intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries, he said.

"We are firm that the days when imperial powers could tell others how to behave, whether politically, economically or culturally, are over," he said.

Najib with Commonwealth Secretary General Patricia Scotland

Alluding to a past leader, Najib said Malaysia had decided that its foreign relations would no more be characterised by caustic words and barbed comments and instead, be moderate in its approach.

"This will allow us to reclaim the centre and promote mutual understanding. It is a priority at the national, regional and international levels," he said.

Najib lambasted the past leader who adopted intentionally confrontational foreign policy positions, perhaps for personal popularity.

In choosing to be different and make a clear break from past approaches, Najib said: "No more insisting on awakening old quarrels or harping on old slights that everyone else had forgotten." Najib said that developing relations and economic partnerships with other nations was what promotes peace, security and prosperity for its peoples.

"That has been our approach - and we have seen the benefits, he said, citing the example on how he had worked to deal with legacy issues with Singapore regarding the resolution of the Points of Agreement in 2010 after a 20-year deadlock.

He also drew attention that Malaysia and Singapore would build a high-speed railway between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore to enhance connectivity, economic opportunities and people-to-people contact.

In the Philippines, Malaysia facilitated the negotiations to resolve Asia's longest running insurgency, he said.

Malaysia's desire to build bridges was not confined just to Southeast Asia and had built stronger ties around the world with China, India, Russia, the United States, Japan and the European Union among many others, he said.

He noted that Malaysia also believed in open regionalism and expanding free trade and had signed 13 free trade agreements with other countries.

"Indeed, Malaysian relations with our friends across the continents have never been so warm. And these relationships have borne tangible results," he added.

Malaysia, he said, was also a signatory to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) on its own terms without sacrificing the national interest.

He said if the TPP went ahead as planned, PricewaterhouseCoopers had predicted it would lead Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP) to increase by up to USD211 billion between 2018 and 2027, and would bring additional investment of up to USD239 billion.

"We believe that transforming our economies, and making sure that our foreign policy is based on increasing trade and ties with each other, is a path to peace, security and growth for all.

"It will lead to a future that is based on cooperation, and not dispute," he said.

Najib also said that Malaysia would be a partner to anyone that needs help in the fight against extremism and radicalism, both at home and abroad.

"A scourge (extremism and radicalism) that has brought death and destruction to so many countries - amongst them, Commonwealth states - and which has cast the shadow of its blight here as well," he said.

He said Malaysia safeguarded its vision and practice of moderation by playing a leading role in combating extremism and radicalism, both at home and abroad.

He cited as an example the recently launched Regional Digital Centre for Counter-Messaging Communication in Kuala Lumpur, which will fight the propaganda of Daesh and other terrorists by exposing falsehoods and misinformation.

Najib said Malaysia did not wish for hostility with anyone but neither would it sacrifice its self-respect and democratic process to satisfy countries that seemed to have forgotten that they are living in a multipolar world.

"It is for nations to govern themselves, and for peoples to give governments their democratic mandate," he said.

Najib said he made no apology for defending the sovereignty of Malaysia and the interests of its people.

"We in the Commonwealth many of us from states that were once colonies should recognise that while larger powers may seek to push us to act as they wish, it is our people's right to choose our own path," he said.

The Commonwealth is an association of 53 countries spanning Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific and representing 2.2 billion citizens.

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