

**Najib: Bring down tariffs to zero, eliminate non-tariff barriers**  
**Free Malaysia Today**  
**April 28, 2017**

**The big challenge is to ensure integration of individual economies is driven through, says Prime Minister Najib Razak at 30th Asean Summit.**

MANILA: The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) must work to bring down regional tariffs to zero and eliminate non-tariff barriers, as there is no other alternative to create a seamless economy, says Prime Minister Najib Razak.

He said Asean had made great strides in the last 50 years by multiplying the economy 28 times, from US\$87.2 billion (RM380 billion) in 1975 to US\$2.5 trillion (RM10.88 trillion) in 2014.

It was now expected to grow to US\$9.2 trillion (RM40 trillion) by 2050, making it the fourth largest economic grouping in the world, he said.

“These are big numbers and impressive positions. But we have yet to achieve them. The big challenge is to ensure that the integration of our individual economies, that is necessary for Asean itself to become a significant world market, is driven through.

“On that, we still have a long way to go,” he said today in his keynote address at the Prosperity For All Summit organised by the Asean Business Advisory Council held in conjunction with the 30th Asean Summit here.

Najib, who is also finance minister, said Asean has to further bring down existing trade tariffs.

He cited World Trade Organisation figures which showed that average tariffs in Asean were around 4% in 2015.

“The work to bring them down to zero must be pursued vigorously.”

The region must also work to further facilitate intra-Asean trade, he said.

“To achieve the US\$9.2 trillion figure by 2050, there has to be a 20% reduction in fixed trade costs. We need to work towards facilitative measures such as national single windows seamlessly linked to the Asean single window and standardised customs procedures.”

Most of all, non-tariff barriers and measures – or NTBs and NTMs – known as the “stubborn world-wide problem”, must be reduced and ultimately removed.

The prime minister said between 2000 and 2015, NTBs and NTMs in Asean actually rose, from 1,634 measures to 5,975.

“This has to be checked and reversed. For Asean to reach the target economic total of US\$9.2 trillion, NTBs and NTMs have to be reduced by 50%.

“There is no alternative if we wish to be able to seize that prize. So huge, coordinated efforts are required to deal with this problem.

“These are important, as without economic success, there is nothing to be shared,” he said.

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Source: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/04/28/najib-bring-down-tariffs-to-zero-eliminate-non-tariff-barriers/>