

ASEAN-Australia Summit to enhance regional security, prosperity

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SYDNEY, March 15 (Bernama) -- Economic engagement and counter-terrorism collaboration will be the key areas that will be discussed during the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit that will be held here on March 17 and 18 (Saturday and Sunday).

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said there would be two major lead-in events during this weekend summit, namely a Business Summit and a Counter-Terrorism Conference.

"The Business Summit, among others will encourage Australian small businesses to take up economic opportunities offered in Southeast Asia, while top Australian and ASEAN CEOs (chief executive officers) will discuss ways to enhance economic engagement.

"The Counter-Terrorism Conference will strengthen regional collaboration between Australia and ASEAN to combat terrorism and violent extremism," he said in a statement posted on the summit's official website, aseanaustralia.pmc.gov.au.

He said the summit marked a coming of age of Australia's relationship with South East Asia as Australia and ASEAN were close strategic and economic partners.

"The special summit is an opportunity to make the region more secure and more prosperous. ASEAN is one of Australia's top three trading partners, and we have strong cooperation on countering security threats facing our region. Nearly one million Australians claim Southeast Asian ancestry. ASEAN leaders and I will discuss ways to increase our

engagement on education, economic cooperation, countering terrorism and other security challenges," added Turnbull.

Noting that Australia had strong longstanding and close relationships with each ASEAN member state, he would meet each of his visiting counterparts individually to discuss ways to strengthen these ties.

The Malaysian delegation to the special summit will be led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

The special summit will be the first time Australia hosts such an event.

Australia and ASEAN have been close partners since its inception in 1967. ASEAN economies as a group are already equivalent to one of Australia's top three trading partners, and ASEAN and Australia cooperate closely to address shared security challenges facing the region.

The special summit is an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen the partnership and enhance the region's security and prosperity.

During the special summit, ASEAN and Australia will build on their deep legacy of cooperation to establish a contemporary and outward-looking partnership for the rapidly changing world. They will unlock new opportunities for the economies and strengthen their joint work to countering terrorism and other common security threats.

The summit outcomes will also reflect their contemporary challenges, addressing cyber threats, adapting to digital transformation and using technology to make their cities the best possible places to live.

The Business Summit will comprise three events. A CEO Forum will allow top Australian and ASEAN CEOs to discuss ways to enhance economic engagement, while the SME (Small

and Medium-sized Enterprises) Conference will enable Australian small businesses to take up economic opportunities offered in the ASEAN region.

The Women in Business Breakfast will reinforce the important message that women's economic empowerment underpins future regional prosperity and stability.

The Counter-Terrorism Conference will highlight the importance of regional collaboration to address the shared threat of terrorism and violent extremism.

Meanwhile in KUALA LUMPUR, Australian Ambassador to ASEAN, Jane Duke said the region faced threats that could not be dealt with, by one country acting alone, and protecting the people against harm from criminals and terrorists was best done by sharing intelligence, skills and knowledge.

"The Summit will reinforce these efforts and prepare against threats from new fronts in technology and cyber space. Finally, it will build on one of Southeast Asia's greatest successes - economic growth," she said in a statement from the Australian High Commission.

She said Australia and ASEAN were proof that both became better off as their economies and businesses moved closer.

Australia is enjoying its 27th year of unbroken economic growth while ASEAN's gross domestic product has quadrupled over the past 15 years, creating a huge new middle class.

Duke noted that Southeast Asian migrants and their families had helped Australia become the most successful multicultural society in the world, and today, almost half of all Australians were born overseas or have at least, one parent born overseas.

To further regional economic integration, ASEAN and Australia along with China, India, Japan and South Korea as well as New Zealand were negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

Some 1.4 million visitors from ASEAN came to Australia for work, business or tourism in the past year and each year, about three million Australians visit countries in the region to see their natural beauty and experience culture.

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