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A letter must have a writer's name, signature, home address, phone and MyKad numbers. It should ideally **not be more than 500 words.**
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LETTERS

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ASEAN NEEDS PUBLIC SUPPORT

ASEAN's announcement on the establishment of the Asean Community 2015 marked an important milestone in the organisation's history.

Under the three pillars of political, economic and socio-cultural themes, Asean projected the idea of "One Vision, One Identity, One Community" to promote an inclusive and people-centred community for the next 10 years.

By bringing people together, strengthening economic ties and boosting security, Asean aims to build a future of shared wellbeing of prosperity, stability and togetherness.

A significant determinant in the success of the goal lies in public involvement and engagement in the Asean Community.

To build a community, Asean needs its citizens to feel connected to the organisation and its initiatives. The importance of public connectivity to regional organisations is reaffirmed by the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom.

The involvement of the voters in the referendum indicated that public opinion was crucial in the decision-making process involving the organisation.

However, experts claim that Asean, due to its state-centric nature, has been too elitist in its policy formulation, with almost no public opinion-solicitation process.

These claims have been supported by studies that indicate that, in spite of the euphoria of an Asean Community, many people in the region are unaware of Asean as a regional organisation, let alone community-building initiatives undertaken by member states and the Asean Secretariat.

This absence of public engagement in Asean's regional community-building initiatives can be attributed to the diverse political values and historical make-up of the region.

Without public engagement, there will be no community to build.

Since the Asean Charter aims to promote a people-oriented Asean, it is important to engage the people regarding the initiative, especially as the region is heading for the establishment of Asean Community Vision 2025.

As an Asean founding member, Malaysia has taken a more consultative approach in the formulation of its policies.

The International Trade and Industry Ministry and Foreign Ministry have conducted dialogues with industry players, business associations and civil societies to forge cooperation and engagement that would pave the way for greater synergy between the public and private sectors.

Using the bottom-up approach in soliciting public opinion will help in the development of strategies to generate support for the integration initiative.

In the long run, it would increase a sense of inclusivity among the people to regional community-building initiatives, while boosting the country's image and reputation as a maturing democracy that appreciates public participation and discourse in policy making, especially on the international stage.

Being the cornerstone of Malaysia's foreign policy, Asean provides the platform for the country to address issues that impact its national interest while maintaining bilateral relations with member states.

Hence, it is only valid that the opinion and support of the public be known to make decisions that cater for the public's needs.

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