

Asean needs new thrust, says Najib

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KUALA LUMPUR: Asean requires a new thrust and its leaders must revitalise the regional organisation and establish cooperative ventures.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak said yesterday the Asean leaders should work together to strengthen the institutions within the Asean framework and establish cooperative ventures, as many and as diverse as possible.

"Concomitantly, there is a need to further integrate our economies by increasing intra-Asean trade and investment, in order to bolster our fundamentals and better prepare us in fac-

ing global financial and economic forces," he said.

Najib said this in his paper "South-East Asia in 2003: How we see the world" at the Asia-Inc Forum on Leadership for Southeast Asia yesterday. The forum was opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Monday night.

Najib said Asean governments must never allow the grouping and Southeast Asia to be made irrelevant and marginalised, worst still if the members were the cause of this decline into obscurity.

He challenged the 10-member Asean grouping to strengthen the region's resilience in facing challenges.

"Too often, we are quick to go into our cocoons when we face external problems, which by right we should

consult each other," he said.

"We can all recognise the need for states to project and preserve their own national interest.

"However, sometimes, we must go beyond the mere interest of nations to take into account the region's,"

He urged the members to think in broader and wider terms and perspectives as these initiatives could strengthen the region and also the nations.

Najib also said Asean should not be allowed to be marginalised by the superpowers.

Since Asean had gained the respect of others around the world over the decades, it would be a shame or tragedy if it lost that momentum. -theedgedai-lpcom