

Newspaper	New Straits Times
Date	4/6/2013

TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 2013

PM: Inclusive growth vital

NST-4/6/2013

THREE CHALLENGES: Asian nations must resolve development, sustainability, security issues

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ASIAN nations must deepen their commitment to cooperate on climate change, regional security and development, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

He said the three primary challenges of development, sustainability and conflict were closely connected and must be met if Asia were to fulfil "the promise of a century".

"Asian development must be inclusive, checking rising inequality and division. It must be sustainable, for the new economic powers cannot repeat the mistakes of the old.

"And, the fracture at the heart of Asia's internal politics must be healed, lest they splinter under the weight of the world's attention," he said in delivering the keynote address at the 27th Asia Pacific Roundtable last night.

The prime minister said the United Nations remained the best hope for securing a global settlement and commitment to binding carbon cuts.

"All countries should stand in favour of emissions reductions, and unite behind the promise of a global low-carbon economy."

Najib also warned of the dangers of unchecked defence spending against a backdrop of underlying currents of nationalism, aggression and discord.

With Asia's defence spending rising by nearly five per cent last year, he said, the region could be sucked into an arms race, bringing a higher risk of conflict and disruption to trade.

"From longstanding tensions on the Korean peninsula to border disputes in Kashmir and the insurgency in the south of Thailand, conflict threatens to disrupt Asia's development.

"I believe the answer lies in greater cooperation. Confronted with complex disagreements between states, Asia must place its trust in diplomatic solutions."

Turning his attention to the South China Sea, Najib said a Code of Conduct should be passed in order to ensure claimants did not



Regent of Perak Raja Dr Nazrin Shah and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak (left) arriving for the 27th Asia Pacific Roundtable in Kuala Lumpur last night. Pic by Syarafiq Abd Samad

act unilaterally.

"For Asian nations, the problem is ours to solve.

"Should we stray from the path of dialogue and cooperation, we may pave the way for other parties to take remedial action to protect the freedom of navigation and safe passage."

Najib also highlighted the need to ensure Asia's development brought economic prosperity to all and not just riches for a few.

He called for the formation of a single Southeast Asian market, in the hope of binding the regional economic community in the service of common goals.

"A thriving single market will support jobs, growth and increase the standard of living of more than half a billion people.

"It will also ensure that Asia's remarkable growth story spills across into all member states."

Organised by the Institute of

Strategic and International Studies, the opening of the roundtable was also attended by the Regent of Perak Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, China's Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Fu Ying, Brunei's Second Foreign Affairs Minister Pehin Seri Lim Jock Seng, Asean-Isis chairman Prince Norodom Sirivudh, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed and Isis Malaysia chairman Tan Sri Jawhar Hassan.