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'AI tech the way to go'

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Najib: IT giants want Asean to develop digital economy

**MERGAWATI
ZULFAKAR**
in Sunnylands,
California



THE usually mundane US-Asean summit was given a new twist yesterday when the CEOs of three tech giants gave a presentation on the digital economy to the 10 Asean leaders and their host President Barack Obama.

The CEOs of Microsoft, IBM and Cisco were invited to do their short presentation where they told the leaders that Asean had a chance to leapfrog not only at the level of digital economy and beyond but also on the use of cognitive artificial intelligence.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the use of the AI technology could help resolve many delivery issues more effectively and at lower cost.

"These could include sectors such as healthcare, traffic management and natural disasters.



**Warm
welcome:**
Obama and
Najib waving
to Asean
leaders upon
their arrival
at the Asean
Summit in
Sunnylands,
California. —
Bernama

"They said we have to develop the necessary skills to leapfrog to a higher level. As such, the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education is necessary to prepare for the next generation to fill data-powered jobs," he told Malaysian reporters at the end of the first day of the US-Asean Summit here yesterday.

The IT bosses also suggested that

the digital eco system be developed in schools, universities and start-up companies.

Najib, who was the first to pose a question, asked about the failure of the industrial age to sustain jobs, citing the car manufacturing in Detroit which had led to people doing lower-paying jobs.

"That raised the question that if you move towards digital economy

and AI, would that lead to dislocation of jobs and ensure higher paying jobs. So the answer given is we must be prepared to strengthen STEM and reskilling of workers."

Asked if Malaysia was prepared for the digital economy, Najib said the country was not achieving the 60:40 ratio in schools and needed to give fresh impetus to STEM.

"There are a lot of challenges because the structural change taking place in the global economy has huge ramifications and we have to prepare for that."

Najib also took note of the importance that Washington placed on Asean as the summit here was held during President's Day which is a public holiday in the US.

"The fact that the US President gave up his holiday to meet with Asean leaders goes to show that Asean has been recognised on the world stage as an important bloc of nations which has potential," he said.

He also hoped the US would continue its policy to engage Asean after Obama leaves office next year.