

**'Asean youth detached'**  
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**BIG SCOPE:** Najib says countries must develop programmes to excite younger generation

YOUTH in the region are detached about Asean, thinking that it is a distant institution with no relevance to their lives, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday.

"It is this mindset that we need to change by increasing the younger generation's interest in Asean and helping them see and understand their power and their potential.

"But to achieve this, we must develop programmes, projects and initiatives and involve them in many, meaningful ways.

"I speak from experience when I say that it is a lot more fun to participate and see the benefits of Asean in person rather than to sit up late at night writing an essay on them," he said in his keynote address for the "Leadership Challenges in Asean: Meeting Tomorrow's Needs and Expectations" forum, organised by the Asean Strategy and Leadership Institute and the Cambodian Ministry of Commerce and Government.

Najib said he believed there was huge scope to engage youth.

"But at whatever level we are working at, it is no longer good enough to fall back on the same old antiquated methods. We need to capture the imaginations of our young people, to feed their dreams and to inspire them to believe that they can make a difference to their country, their region and their world."

He highlighted the significance of human development to ensure Asean's economic progress.

"It is said that the Asean workforce is all too often considered low-skilled, knowledge-poor and lacking in opportunities for personal and professional development.

"That is why I made the development of human capital one of my key priorities as Malaysia strives towards achieving our goal of becoming a high-income nation by 2020.

"But it is clear that progress must be driven by all Asean members."

For this to change, he said there was a need to change the mindsets of employers and employees to allow them to see development as an investment rather than a cost.

He said Asean's successes did not mean leaders could be complacent. We must continue to adapt, evolve and reform wherever necessary.

"In three years as prime minister, I have made sure this is exactly what we have been doing: putting in place a number of far-reaching transformation programmes to pull all of our citizens, and not just some of them, out of the middle-income trap."

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