

**Youths Detached From Asean, Says Najib**  
**Bernama**  
**April 4, 2012**

PHNOM PENH, April 4 (Bernama) -- There is a degree of detachment from Asean among its youths with the view that the regional grouping is a distant institution that has no relevance to them or to their lives, said Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today.

The prime minister said Asean needed to change this mindset by increasing the younger generation's interest in Asean and helping them see and understand their power and potential.

"Asean must develop programmes, projects and initiatives that involve them in meaningful ways in achieving the target," he said in his keynote address at the 9th Asean Leadership Forum, here.

"I speak from experience when I say there 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 believed there was a huge scope to get youths engaged and to initiate new programmes at many levels - education, government grants and Asean-funded activities.

Najib said it was no longer good enough to fall back on the same old, antiquated methods Asean had employed for far too long.

"We need to capture the imagination of our young people, to feed their dreams and aspirations and to inspire them to believe that they can make a difference to their country, their region and their world."

He said there was a need for the younger generation to become more active, empowered and engaged as they were the people who would take the ideals of Asean forward, build on its progress and develop its institutions and its aims.

Creativity, he said, was a quality that too often still eluded Asean despite the high levels of economic growth and the amazing progress that the region had witnessed.

"We might be highly dedicated employees, capable of working hard and fulfilling what is asked of us, but as things stand, the best and most creative new ideas still come from elsewhere in the world.

"There is of course no obvious, easy solution to this problem - if there was I think we would have solved it already, given that we are among the best in the world in terms of maths, science and remembering facts.

"This talent conceals part of the problem with schools focusing too narrowly on traditional subjects and never really nourishing the more artistic and creative sides of young people," he said.

Noting that nurturing those skills and talents was not the sole responsibility of schools, Najib said everyone including politicians, businessmen, parents, teachers and students alike must help change attitudes and play their part.

He said human development was an area of crucial importance for the region's continued economic progress.

"It is a sad fact that the Asian workforce is all too often still considered low-skilled, poor in knowledge and lacking in opportunities for personal and professional development.

"Asean must change the mindset of both employees and employers, ensuring that human development is seen as an investment rather than a cost."

He said this would not be easy but the benefits of such a shift would be felt on all sides.

Employees would develop the skills they needed to compete in an increasingly competitive global marketplace which would in turn help employers build and grow their businesses, he said.

A stronger business sector, the premier said, meant member countries would benefit both directly due to increased productivity and indirectly as a result of factors such as increased foreign direct investment.

"The benefits of Asean are clear for all to see as at the most basic economic level, around a quarter of our countries' trade is done with Asean," he said.

Najib also said that in three years as prime minister of Malaysia, he made sure his government had put in place a number of far-reaching transformation programmes to pull all its citizens and not just some of them out of the middle-income trap.

"The country has seen real change across all fronts - income is rising, the economy is continuing to post strong and stable growth and government services are getting better and more responsive to the needs of those who use them," he said.

The forum was organised by the Asian Strategy Leadership Institute (ASLI) and the Cambodian government.

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