

**Access to Higher Education Improves Lives – Najib
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PETALING JAYA, Feb 27 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said a quarter of Malaysians aged between 18 and 24 are now pursuing higher education, thanks to the government's continued efforts to improve and widen access to education to citizens.

The prime minister noted that when Universiti Malaya took its first batch of students in 1959, there were only slightly over 300 students enrolled in higher education in this country, before the numbers improved to about 4,500 in 1967.

"Today, with increased access to education, it's estimated that one in four Malaysians aged between 18 and 24 are in higher education," he said when opening the Unitar International University's new campus in Kelana Jaya, here today.

Present were Second Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh, Unitar chancellor Datuk Mohamed Nizam Tun Abdul Razak and chairman Datuk Seri Dr Suleiman Mohamed.

Najib noted that increasing access to education at every level for all could improve the odds of success for those who were born in less fortunate circumstances.

"Over the years we've fought poverty through education," Najib said, adding that education was also a potent medicine to address income inequality.

"Today, we see many sons and daughters of fishermen, rubber tappers and farmers return to their kampung during Hari Raya, Chinese New Year and Deepavali as doctors, engineers and lawyers," he said.

The prime minister drove home the point that widening access to education should go hand in hand with efforts to increase the quality of education.

In this connection, Najib called for greater collaboration and engagement between local and international universities, saying that Unitar was one of the institutions created for this purpose.

He said armed with education, people would be able to overcome challenges that may come their way.

"And an educated person is not just about having a degree but, more importantly, having the right attitude towards life," he added.

On Unitar, which was set up in 1997, Najib hoped the university which was named after his late father, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, could continue to grow into a top private institution of higher learning based on the spirit and legacy left by the creator of the National Education Policy.

"On behalf of my family members, I wish to congratulate Unitar on the launching of this new campus and pray that it will continue to progress in providing quality education to the community," he said.

The new 15-story campus building built on an environment-friendly concept also has facilities for the disabled group and capable of accommodating 8,000 students.

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