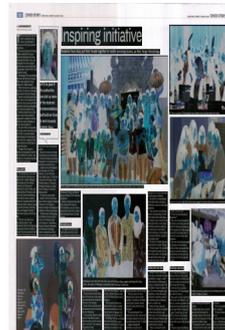


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# Inspiring initiative

**Students from Asia put their heads together to tackle pressing issues, as they forge friendships.**

**DR WOO TAI KWAN**



We're in Jakarta: HYLI 2008 participants taking a break at the West Kalimantan Pavilion after completing the Amazing Race event in Taman Mini.



Charming: The Vietnamese team won over the audience with their graceful traditional dance at the welcome dinner.

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The Malaysian team (from left) Yanti, Rena, Alan and Yom Nurul Akmar, together with Datuk Pian Sukro (centre), who spoke on "Managing a sustainable supply of energy" at the forum.



Sir, I have a question: The Indonesian team members were vocal and spoke their minds.



I can prove my point: Alan (left) and his team engaged in intensive discussions and brainstormed for ideas.



Getting to know you: Joshua in an ice-breaking activity at the SOS Children's Village in Cibubur.

## »It'd be good if the authorities can pick up some of the students' recommendations and build on them to work towards a better Asia«

TOSHIHITO FUJITA

the case for closer economic integration.

Many felt that this year's theme, "Strengthening Asian Partnerships — Economic Integration and Energy Management", was timely in view of escalating food and fuel costs.

In Jakarta to keep the Malaysian flag flying high were R. Rena Rajadorai, 23, and Yom Nurul Akmar Abdul Lahsan, 21 (both from Universiti Putra Malaysia), Yanti Norafizza Mansor, 23 (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia), and Alan Kwan Wai Ming, 23 (Universiti Malaysia Sabah).

The dynamic young leaders — together with their peers from Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines — showed a breadth of knowledge and confidence well beyond their years.

"Should countries still be giving out subsidies in future, and if so, what sort of subsidies should we be looking at?" asked Rena, a third-year Human Development and Information Technology student, undaunted by the fact that she was directing a question

at Indonesia's Energy and Mineral Resources Minister, Prof Ir Purnomo Yusgiantoro.

Business entrepreneurship student Alan, nicknamed Mr Sharp by HYLl moderators, was also vocal in expressing his views that a stronger and more united Asean is the way forward.

### No-holds barred

The students also found themselves totally immersed in three days of intensive workshops that ran concurrently with the forum.

They spent hours brainstorming ideas, dissecting issues and examining viewpoints, often working till the wee hours of the morning.

But all of them said they found the experience not only interesting but also exhilarating.

"I am pursuing a degree in education, but I have learnt so much about economics and the environment," said Yanti. "This workshop has opened my eyes."

"This is the most honest work-

**T**HE food-versus-fuel crisis, the need for alternative energy resources, and obstacles to forging closer East Asian economic cooperation ...

These were issues that 28 of Asia's brightest students had to grapple with as they listened to views expounded by leaders in Asia, and exchanged ideas with academics and their peers at the ninth Hitachi Young Leaders' Initiative (HYLI) held in Jakarta recently.

Interestingly, HYLI was held about the same time that the Developing Eight nations gathered in Kuala Lumpur for a similar purpose.

While the former was a gathering of youths, the latter was a meeting of senior leaders from the D8 nations.

However, the youths proved they were a force to be reckoned with as they rose to the occasion and enthusiastically traded barbs and opinions as to what looms ahead for Asia.

Hosted by Hitachi Asia Ltd, HYLI aims to groom future leaders by giving youths a platform to discuss global and regional challenges as well as forge stronger ties.

This year's HYLI, a five-day event, saw young leaders from seven countries listen to top leaders address issues plaguing the Asian region at a two-day forum, engage in closed-door workshops and participate in a community project.

"Through HYLI, we hope to empower young people to take the lead in building Asia's future," said Hitachi Ltd vice-president and executive officer Masao Hisada.

### Ideas galore

"Do something now, do not wait. Assert yourselves and make yourselves heard," said the Philippines director-general of the National Economic and Development Authority, Dr Cielito F Habito, as he addressed about 300 people at the forum that featured presentations by formidable orators, including Indonesia's Education Minister Prof Bambang Sudibyo, Malaysia's Energy Commission chairman Datuk Pian Sukro, and Singapore's National Environment Agency CEO Lee Yuen Hee.

"Unless we are united, East Asia will not make it," said Indonesia's Centre for Strategic and International Studies Foundation board of directors chairman Prof Dr Djisman S Simandjuntak, pressing



shop I have ever attended," said Lim Jia Ling, a political science undergrad at the National University of Singapore.

"Our discussions touched on many sensitive issues, including how Asean countries were leaking top talents to Singapore, but surprisingly, we could all take it."

The findings from the workshops were later presented at a press conference, which saw HYLI representatives, in a reversal of roles, take centre stage to present ideas

and take questions from the media.

"The key to closer East Asian integration lies in greater understanding," said Paulo Jose M. Mutuc, a fourth-year Economics student from De La Salle University in the Philippines.

"We can only integrate if we understand each other, and how well we integrate depends on how much we understand each other," he added.

Singapore Management University's law and business management student, Joshua Lim,

suggested that countries listen more to avoid myopic worldviews.

The students' recommendations clearly showed they could look at things from a macro as well as micro perspective.

"Sure, we have to look at the big picture," enthused Joshua, "but we need to begin with smaller things. For instance, what I would like to do when I get home is to start a mock East Asian community conference in schools, like the mock United Nations conference, so that students can present different countries to discuss global issues."

HYLI director Toshihito Fujita was pleased with the students' findings.

"It would be good if the authorities in the respective countries pick up some of the students' recommendations and build on them to work towards a better Asia," he said.

### Letting their hair down

However, HYLl was not all work and no play as participants were given opportunities to engage in social-cultural activities, including participating in a community project at the SOS Children's Village in Cibubur (see page 12) and an Amazing Race-style competition at Taman Mini, which introduced the students to some of the interesting sights of Indonesia, albeit on a smaller scale.

Armed with maps, paper and pencils, the participants were divided into four teams and had to solve riddles to get to their final destination, the West Kalimantan Pavilion, where they were welcomed by girls clad in colourful Balinese costumes.

"There's a missing piece in this puzzle!"

"Quick, check this out!"  
"Is there an information board somewhere?"

These were common comments as the students pitted brains and brawn under the blisteringly hot Jakarta sun and raced against each other, hopping onto sky lifts and chasing "buses" to be the first to arrive at their target destination.

They were also feted and serenaded at a sumptuous welcome dinner, which saw them tossing aside thinking caps for colourful costumes as they performed sketches and traditional dances from their respective countries.

### Enriching experience

If it is true that the journey of a thousand miles start with a single step, then surely, for the HYLl participants, that single step was taken at the biennial meet this year.

Yom Nurul Akmar said that participating in HYLl had changed her worldview forever.

Rena agreed, saying, "I never realised, till now, how difficult it is to come to a common agreement at an international meeting where there are so many different viewpoints."

Japan's Yasushi Hara, 26, said HYLl had shown him the importance of connecting with others, and intends to pass on this message online.

Vietnam's Nguyen Mai Phuong, 22, said she had learnt that there is

unity in diversity, and uniqueness in unity.

Perhaps Paulo sums it up best when he said that besides the friendships forged at HYLl, he had also learnt the importance of being proactive and taking charge.

"The operative word is 'initiative'.  
"We have to tell the older people that, yes, we are young but we are not foolish.

"We are not idealistic. We know what is going on.

"We have to show them that, yes, we can."

Indeed, if feedback from participants is anything to go by, HYLl 2008 has definitely delivered what Hitachi's tagline promised - Inspire the next (generation)!