



(From left) Dr Amrita Cheema, senior anchor of German broadcaster Deutsche Welle; Datuk Yasmin Mahmood, chief executive officer of Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation; Mr Rajan Anandan, vice-president of Google (India and South-east Asia); Mr Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, Malaysia's Youth and Sports Minister; Professor Annie Koh, vice-president of Singapore Management University's Office of Business Development; and Mr Le Hong Minh, founder of Vietnam's Internet giant VNG Corporation, spoke at yesterday's session on how to ensure Asean is inclusive as it embraces its digital future. PHOTO: WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Young KL minister steals the show at session on digital future

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How do you adapt? You don't, really. You disrupt.

How do you raise money? You don't. You do what you do well and wait for people to offer you money.

Sharing this and other pieces of advice during the first panel discussion at the World Economic Forum on Asean here yesterday were members who included a minister, Google executive and technology entrepreneur.

Hundreds of Vietnamese students turned up to hear them talk about how to ensure Asean is inclusive as it embraces its digital future.

The star of the show was undeniably Malaysia's 25-year-old Youth and Sports Minister Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, a champion debater who turned down a schol-

arship to study at Oxford University to serve his country after the general election in May.

Young people, he told the audience, are changing the world, and governments should give due recognition in order to fully tap this potential. Changes in technology have removed age barriers to tasks which were limited to certain segments of society, he said, noting some of the very best start-ups are founded by young entrepreneurs.

"Due recognition must be given by the government, by corporate sectors, to ensure that in the end, we can march forward and not just become leaders of tomorrow, but also shape the future today," Mr Syed Saddiq said.

Asked by a student how one should adapt to the fast-changing circumstances, he replied: "I don't believe that young people should just adapt. If it is about adaptation, I am pretty sure I wouldn't be here

today, because adaptation means you conforming to the convention, and convention unfortunately usually underprivileges young people because... of age and experience.

"My suggestion for the youth of Asean is for you to think out of the box... find that ever-burning passion, push all the way and use the most unconventional means."

Asked by a participant about data protection in the light of the European Union's recently introduced data privacy regulations, he suggested instead that too many safeguards may make it harder for small companies to surmount monopolistic or oligopolistic markets.

"I believe data should be as open, transparent and accessible as possible," he said. "Data protection is important, but overzealous regulation in the long run will hurt the development especially of small and medium enterprises, and tech start-ups."

Fellow panellist Annie Koh, vice-president of Singapore Management University's Office of Business Development, called Mr Syed Saddiq a "rock star".

Mr Le Hong Minh, founder of Vietnam's Internet giant VNG Corporation, playfully asked the crowd: "How many of you would like to be a minister at the age of 25, like him?"

A sea of hands shot up.

Mr Minh had his own advice to share when asked how aspiring entrepreneurs could raise funds.

The best way is to focus on what you do really well so financiers will come knocking, he said. "When you are so good, people like myself, or Rajan, say 'please take my money, please,'" he said, to the amusement of fellow panellist Rajan Anandan, vice-president of Google (India and South-east Asia).

Like Mr Syed Saddiq, Mr Minh urged the crowd not to do "the normal stuff" because the future is often what people at present think is "magical" and "unimaginable".

"Think about your own interests. Think about something that really makes you excited. And maybe that something is going to be cool for you in the next 10 years."

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