

## Youth feel sense of ASEAN citizenship: Survey

Abdul Khalik  
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The latest survey released by ASEAN on Tuesday shows some 75 percent of students and young people in ASEAN nations felt they were citizens of the 10-nation Asian grouping.

The survey found nearly 99 percent of students and young Asians felt membership in ASEAN was beneficial to their nations and some 70 percent felt it was beneficial to them personally.

Jakartan resident and foreign bank employee, 23-year-old Suwandy said he felt an affinity toward the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

When asked about the 40-year-old grouping Suwandy said, "I feel that I am a member of the ASEAN community".

"During my conversations with several young people from other ASEAN countries recently, I found that they shared the same feeling," he said Tuesday.

Suwandy's sentiment represents the majority of young people in the region.

The survey, which was conducted by Eric C. Thompson of the National University of Singapore and Chulanee Thianthai of the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, included 2,170 students from 10 universities across the 10 grouping's members last year.

The survey found students from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam had the highest awareness with 96 percent, 93 percent and 92 percent respectively.

Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam are the newest members of ASEAN, having joined the grouping in the 1990s.

They are often referred to as the newest four, or CMLV, and their development lacks



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**AWARENESS FORUM:** The secretary general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Surin Pitsuwan (center), talks to the director of South East Asian Studies, K. Kesavapany (left), the incoming director of ASEAN Foundation, Apichai Sunchindah (right), ASEAN's former secretary general, Tan Sri Ajit Singh (third left), researcher from the Chulalongkorn University of Thailand, Chulanee Thianthai (second right), and researcher from the National University of Singapore, Eric C. Thomson (third right), after delivering his speech at the ASEAN Awareness Forum in Jakarta on Tuesday.

behind the more senior six member countries.

The survey is supported by the ASEAN Foundation — the socio-cultural arm of the ASEAN Secretariat — and found students in Singapore had the weakest affinity toward the grouping, with some 49 percent saying they were citizens of the grouping.

About 73 percent of Indonesian respondents, felt they were ASEAN citizens, the survey found.

Some 60 percent of ASEAN students said they were familiar with the grouping.

Vietnam and Laos topped

the list of the student familiarity index, with more than 83 percent and 84 percent respectively.

Myanmar came in at the bottom of this index, with 9.6 percent of its students saying they were familiar with ASEAN.

More than 68 percent of Indonesian students felt they were familiar with the grouping.

In term of willingness to know more about other ASEAN countries, some 92 percent of students said they were interested in learning more about their neighboring countries.

Again, students from Laos,

Cambodia and Vietnam also showed the highest interest around wanting to know more about neighboring ASEAN countries.

ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan welcomed the findings and said the results would be useful in portraying levels of awareness and sense of belonging.

"The survey is very useful as we have to begin somewhere to start to build our socio-cultural pillar or people-to-people ties," Surin said in a speech to release the survey.

"We can't no longer take for granted that we have com-

monalities in our socio-cultural relations.

"We have to consolidate ourselves to enhance our sense of belonging."

ASEAN Foundation executive director Apichai Sunchindah said raising awareness around ASEAN among young people was crucial in building socio-cultural ties within the grouping.

"They are the future of ASEAN," Apichai said.

"But the survey shows that we need different approaches for different nations in raising the sense of belonging."

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