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The Straits Times Thursday July 5 2007

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## Asean chief: Make education more accessible

By JANE NG

ASEAN countries should look into making their education systems more student-oriented and affordable, said Asean Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong at an education conference yesterday.

They should also teach students to be "mega-centric" – not just good citizens of their

country but also of Asean as a whole – by appreciating the international element and its associated concerns.

"With the fast developments around the region, if students are narrowly focused, we'll be in trouble in future," he said.

Mr Ong, the guest of honour at the Global Education Conference organised by the Academy of Principals, was addressing an audience of

500 educators and leaders from 14 countries, including Singapore.

The theme of the two-day conference held at the Waterfront Conference Centre, was Leading Schools In An Interconnected World.

Speaking on the need to make education more affordable and accessible, Mr Ong said that while Singapore has an adult literacy rate of 99 per cent, there were other

countries in Asean such as Cambodia and Laos where the figure was much lower and more was needed to help children get access to education.

In some places, such as rural villages in Laos, children have to walk for an hour to catch a bus, which would then take another 40 minutes to get them to school.

Mr Ong also reminded school leaders to be more

open to new ideas, including new ways of teaching and discovering the talents of their students.

Besides the presentation of original papers, panel discussions and school visits have also been planned.

Keynote speakers include Professor Andy Hargreaves from Boston College and Professor Lee Sing Kong, director of the National Institute of Education.