

Cultural diplomacy and interaction can help to boost ties

SOCIOCULTURAL cooperation encourages Asean and European Union institutions to support initiatives that foster people-to-people connections through cultural, social and educational activities.

For decades, the EU has been a strategic partner of Asean, supporting its community-building programmes. Citizens from both regions are increasingly travelling between the two for cultural, business, educational and other reasons.

The 2007 Nuremberg Declaration reaffirmed both regions' commitment to collaborations, including preventing the transmission of contagious illnesses, promoting people-to-people interaction through cultural and educational exchanges, and collaborating in Science, Technology, and Innovation.

The EU's formal projects offering

support to Asean include READI and EU-Share. Inter-regional and regional dynamics in higher education have resulted in increased research cooperation and student mobility in the EU and Asean during the last few decades.

The European Higher Education Area and its framework, which includes agreements on qualification frameworks and educational quality certification, were established as part of the Bologna Process, which began in 1999.

Learners from 49 European countries that make up the EHEA now have more educational compatibility. The EU programme for education, training, youth and sport (Erasmus) and other programmes encourage researchers and students to complete part of their study or research abroad for a more comprehensive educational experience.

Several Asia-Europe Ministerial Meetings have underlined the importance of balanced student mobility between Asia and Europe.

However, credit harmonisation challenges, inflexible syllabi, and a slew of other issues have emerged as roadblocks, particularly for European students enrolling in educational courses in the Asean region. Nonetheless, these are gradually improving.

The Asean Universities Network (Asean Credits Transfer System) and organisations such as Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Regional Centre specialising in higher education and development (Seameo Rihed) have made substantial contributions to the objective of establishing a single credit transfer system.

Such initiatives are already giving consistency to the Asean region's educational system. Governments

have been working hard to keep their economies afloat, as lockdowns have severely interrupted economic activity, not to mention the fact that certain countries' health system has been stretched to breaking point.

The EU council's proposed cultural policy approach emphasises the equality of all cultures and the need for stronger inter- and transcultural interaction.

The emphasis is on fostering an intercultural discussion that promotes mutual understanding and benefits. People who participate in cultural activities or study another country's language are more inclined to trust that country and its government policies, according to research.

They may return to that country to visit, study, or do business, contributing to the economy of the host country.

The European Commission outlined key focus areas in its Joint Communication on International Cultural Relations that would aid the EU in engaging with countries in the arena.

These are developing cultural and intercultural discourse for peaceful inter-community interactions and strengthening collaboration on cultural heritage.

The Asean Social-Cultural Community collaborates with civil society to build a shared Asean identity.

Cultural diplomacy and cultural relations are critical instruments in the 21st century for states to select how they want to be perceived by the rest of the world.

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