

FIRST EAST ASIA CONGRESS

FORGING EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATION



(From left) Dr Francisco Nemenzo of the Philippines, Juan Miguel Padua of the Philippines (chairperson) and Prof. Dato' Dr Ibrahim Ahmad Bajunid of Malaysia.

In the wake of globalisation, there is no room for parochialism and students must be made aware of the realities. Today's youth must understand the dynamics of the new world order. Session Five, held on 5 August 2003, looks at how educational collaboration across the age spectrum can be forged and Wan Portia Hamzah gives us this report.

The idea of forging educational collaboration is not a new one in Asean, said first speaker Dr Francisco Nemenzo, President of the University of the Philippines, citing a proposal in the late-1970s by Royal Prof Ungku A. Aziz to set up an Asean University. He said this idea was not easy to implement, even today with the growth of Asean. The alternative was to set up a Southeast Asian Students' Exchange Programme where various universities could institute common courses with a common

syllabus with the aim of allowing students to take up courses from other universities and gain credits. The University of the Philippines did try to initiate such a course of action, but not only was enthusiasm sadly lacking, there also existed territorial jealousies within the academia that represented stumbling blocks to the success of the venture. Furthermore, he noted that students from the region showed a marked preference to pursue their education in the West, rather than opt for the many

universities available within the Asean region.

At the research level, there is a need to plan a research agenda with the priorities identified. Scholars in the region must not only work together to help prevent overlapping in research activities, but also do so for the purposes of networking, an essential aspect of the globalised world. There must be initiatives to build a community of scholars to share interests and ideas.

Prof Nemenzo also stressed that book publishing is another potential area for collaboration. He observed that the region had too many publishing houses and he found the marketing of books from the university presses of member countries lacking. By right, the university presses should promote and market more books originating from the region.

Second speaker Prof. Ibrahim Ahmad Bajunid, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University Tun Abdul Razak, focused on the possibilities of educational collaboration within Asean+3, as well as with other international organisations. He touched on the past, present and future of forging such collaborative efforts and then queried the 'fitness' of countries in the region to do so. He cited the mistakes, successes, and motives of such collaboration and said the region must

accept the economic priorities of the nations involved.

In setting up educational collaboration, he said the economic motive appeared to be to gain economic wealth. As for the political motive, he based it on a policy of altruism or the "enrich thy neighbour" policy for a "win-win" situation.

Like the first speaker, the second speaker also stressed the human resource development aspect and the need for exchanges of people within the East Asia community (EAC). Asean+3 must have a shared vision and a shared direction, which preferably should be referred to now as EAC. He also listed intra- and inter-collaborative efforts, as well as bilateral and multilateral educational collaboration, stressing the need for equality in these efforts. There should not be any dominating power exerting any kind of pressure.

A shared vision and several existing programmes already instituted include collaboration under the Ford Foundation and the British Council. "The Look East" policy also saw some excellent examples of successful educational collaboration with Japan and Korea. He cited other examples, including some 15 specialist educational institutions within Asean (such as the Seameo in Penang for the teaching of mathematics and science). These institutions



Dr Francisco Nemenzo: It is important to obtain funding from within the region as funding from external sources may come with their own agenda.

represented collaboration within the government sector but, as mentioned by Prof Nemenzo, there also existed collaboration among universities.

Besides collaboration in research, Prof Ibrahim also called for collaboration in curricula development and collaboration across industries, potential areas for the EAC to consider to enrich the EAC's future.

During the question and answer session, several issues were raised. New collaborative efforts should complement and not duplicate any of the ongoing collaboration projects. It was generally agreed that technical collaboration was the easiest. Prof Nemenzo said productive scholars, and not bureaucrats nor administrators, should be involved in the preparation of the instruction materials, as in the case of the Institute of Mathematical Scientists, in the National University of Singapore which brought together scholars and practising researchers and developed successful programmes, for example.

The discussion also touched on the twinning programmes held by the various colleges and universities. It was felt that more of such twinning programmes should be instituted and that more case studies pertinent to the region be the subject of discussion in courses such as the MBA course. Prof Nemenzo



Prof. Ibrahim Ahmad Bajunid: As many of the collaborative efforts highlighted involved the 'older' age group (such as the professors in the universities), more programmes for the younger generation, who needed to be instilled with the spirit of national patriotism, should be set up.

remarked that many existing Asean case studies were not used in many of the course work.

Looking to the European Union for its success in reaching a consensus on a credit transfer system, a point was raised that such was not the case in Asean or in Asean+3. A national qualification system was also unavailable in many of the countries of the region to facilitate educational collaborative efforts.

On the specialist institutions mentioned by Prof Ibrahim, it was commented that these functioned largely as training institutions and the difference between training and education must be noted. Collaborative efforts must be forged at the academic and research-based level and

these could be government-to-government, institution-to-institution or foundation-to-foundation. The United Nations University in Japan and the International Islamic University in Malaysia were brought up as examples of co-operative efforts but these institutions too had their problems, for example in maintaining international staff and providing scholarships.

A call was made for the development of a common East Asia curriculum that took into account Asia's traditions and developed Asia's consciousness to study its various cultures as a sense of regional identity remained absent.

Another proposal was to initiate more student exchange programmes, *albeit* an expensive exercise, as they had proven effective in exposing students to the different cultures and experiences in the region.

In summing up, Chairman Juan Miguel Padua, who is currently the Head of International Trade and Economics in the Foreign Service Institute in the Philippines, indicated that many of the proposals made were feasible, especially in the age of information technology.●