

Shackles on education revamp

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Comment

New Sunday Times - 05/10/2009

WHEN the European ministers of education assembled in Louvain de Nieve, Belgium last week to discuss the Bologna Process it was a time to celebrate too.

The Bologna Process, which started a decade ago with only 29 ministers participating, has now expanded into an almost all-European affair.

The 46 participating countries in Louvain exemplified a high degree of cooperation and understanding among the Bologna Process members.

The Bologna Declaration was signed on June 19, 1999 in Bologna, hence the name The Process now stands as a symbol of a successful European reform process aimed at establishing a European Higher Education Area by next year.

This target is surely within reach.

It is envisaged that higher education systems in European countries by next year would be organised in such a way that it further facilitates mobility from one country within the European Higher Education Area to another for the purpose of further study or employment.

This could also extend to other areas outside Europe, given that the European Higher Education Area will provide a broad, high quality knowledge base.

What is astonishing is that the Process is voluntary, and not based on an inter-governmental treaty.

The documents adopted by the countries are not legally binding, yet they are closely adhered to.

In other words, it is very much up to each country to decide what it wants for the benefit of its citizens while at the same time ensuring the creation of a more peaceful, stable and tolerant European community.

How this ambitious overall strategic journey started is now of interest to those who want to emulate it.

In the meeting last week, representatives of some of the countries from Asia, Latin America, Middle-East and the US, were invited to interact with the Europeans and get to know the Process and its achievements.

It was no surprise that many expressed interest and willingness to work closely with the Europeans.

Underlying the question of mobility are issues such as recognition, credit transfers, compatibility of degrees, and quality which were debated based on the various agreed tools and instruments adopted by the Process.

To date, the discussion is about the adoption of the last component in a three-cycle system involving the undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programmes.

The Bologna Process is attempting to encourage a form of a unified system that would make Europe more attractive to students, while at the same time advocating a European-based value system that would ensure its own competitiveness and survival.

The lessons that could be learnt from the Bologna Process are plenty.

In the Asian region which is much more diverse than that of Europe, the Process would certainly prove a good model to emulate.

Asia as a whole will have to take steps to promote its own value-system as well as uniqueness.

From the present geopolitical standpoint, Asia has lost its competitive edge and influence.

Malaysia too, at the national level, seems to have suffered much of the same. This is made worse perhaps by the fragmented education system that exists in the country.

Unlike the Bologna Process that seeks and emphasises common values and platform, it is quite the opposite in Malaysia.

Increasingly education in Malaysia is getting polarised and parochial with little chance of it being integrated to bring about greater understanding and tolerance; and by extension peace and stability in the long run.

Under the concept of 1Malaysia, it is imperative that a more intense focus should be given to this longstanding issue of educational fragmentation.

It would be pertinent to admit that fundamentally the success of 1Malaysia would rest foremost on the successful implementation of 1Education.

Without it, it is difficult to see how 1Malaysia can be realised in the shortest time possible.

If the Bologna Process covering Europe with hundreds of millions of people from diverse cultures and communities can forge a united front in higher education, why can't it be done in Asia?

In Malaysia, all interested parties should break the shackles that is restraining education.

* The writer is the Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia. He can be contacted at vc@usm.my

[Terms & Conditions](#)