



YOUNGSTERS FROM a range of Asean countries collaborate in a project run by the Asean University Network.

STUDENTS JOIN HANDS TO FORGE BRIGHT FUTURE FOR ASEAN

ONRAVEE TANGMEESANG
THE NATION

Students from 13 universities in Asean countries, as well as China, Japan and South Korea, recently took part in the Asean University Network (AUN)'s Young Speakers Contest 2011 near Bangkok.

Thailand's Mahidol University played host to the 12th AUN event under the theme of "Strengthening Asean+3: Higher Education through Community Engagement".

Winning the first prize for her speech-giving talents was Natalia Rialucky Tampubolon from the University of Indonesia. Julian Bautista, from De La Salle University of the Philippines, and Christopher Chok Ke Bin from the National University of Singapore won the



STUDENTS FROM the Asean region learn the value of cooperation during an exercise last year.

second and third prizes, respectively.

Established more than a decade ago, AUN is part of the 10-country Asean grouping in which the Asean Economic Community, one of its three pillars, will be effective in 2015.

While Asean may seem like a government-to-government forum, the relations among its countries' citizens, especially youth, are seen as no less important in forging stronger links between members.

Asean groups together Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Burma, Laos and Cambodia. Besides these 10 member states, Asean also has deepened its relations with regional partners China, Japan and South Korea under the Asean+3 framework. On January 1, 2010, Asean entered into a free trade agreement with China under which most import duties were reduced to zero to facilitate a freer flow of trade. Japan and South Korea also have signed free trade agreements with Asean member countries.

In the cultural and social spheres, the Young Speakers Contest was the latest bid to promote friendship between youth in Asean and the three other Asian economic powerhouses.

According to the AUN Educational Forum, the aim of the contest was to enable youngsters to network and build solid relationships with fellow students across the region.

All participants were students currently enrolled at 26 member universities which are part of the AUN.

The week-long event, which took place from May 2-9, saw 13 institutes select their best public speakers to do battle in Thailand, according to Dr Aim-orn

Wasantwisut, a vice rector of Mahidol University.

Thailand was represented by students from Mahidol University, Chulalongkorn University, Chiang Mai University, and Burapha University.

As well as friendly competition, the emphasis was placed on cooperating, as collaboration is seen as a key to helping strengthen intra-regional relationships.

In a separate but related project, the AUN is promoting the exchange of students and university staff among member countries, as Asean will shortly adopt measures to boost the mobility of skilled labour within the region.

In addition, Unesco is working on another project in which Asean students will be given the opportunity to study in Europe and America.