

People of Asia must stand against conflict: DPM Wong

They should focus on building stronger ties to help make the 21st century the Asian century

Jean Iau

Asia's rise is not a given, and advancing the peace and prosperity in the region is in the hands of its people, said Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on Friday.

The people of Asia must take a strong stand against confrontation and conflict, and focus energies on building stronger ties to exchange ideas and knowledge, he added.

This will help make the 21st century the Asian century, after the 20th century when America made vast advancements and the 19th century of the British Empire, he

said. "The transformation of Asia will ultimately be powered by the brilliance of increasingly skilled workers and entrepreneurs, continually searching for new and better ways of doing things."

Mr Wong was speaking to about 150 people at the closing dialogue of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy's Festival of Ideas 2022.

He stressed the importance of investing in education and technology so that Asian countries can keep progressing in knowledge, scientific excellence and innovation to remain globally competitive.

Mr Wong, who was recently in India, noted that the vast majority of Indian Institutes of Technology

students used to go overseas after graduation to look for jobs. But they are now staying in India not just to work in global companies based in India, but also to start their own companies.

In his speech before the closed-door dialogue, he also highlighted how Asian countries can seek common ground on shared interests that could form the basis for closer regional cooperation.

An example of shared interests is climate change. While countries around and in Asia are working on their green transition, much more needs to be done, and no country will be able to manage the climate transition alone, he said.

"We will need to pool our resources together, especially in the area of finance, because we all know that there are many potential dream projects across the re-



PEOPLE POWER

The transformation of Asia will ultimately be powered by the brilliance of increasingly skilled workers and entrepreneurs, continually searching for new and better ways of doing things.



DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
LAWRENCE WONG

gion which can significantly reduce carbon emissions, but many of them are not bankable; they are not commercially viable," he added, calling for closer collaboration between organisations to help fund green projects.

For South-east Asia, Mr Wong said Asean must redouble efforts to become an effective grouping instead of 10 isolated economies, which would be too small to be worth paying attention to.

He listed cross-border real-time retail payments across Asean countries as one of the meaningful plans that the region has to press on with and stressed the importance of keeping the region open and connected to the world.

He said: "Asia is indeed at a crossroads. How the region progresses in the coming years and decades will depend on the choices we make. Singapore, of course, will do our best to shape the trajectory of developments in this part of the world with more positive outcomes, and we will work with others to shape the regional and international order."

While Singapore cannot prescribe what other countries do, he said, the Republic can be a reliable and trusted partner.

jeaniau@sph.com.sg