

## Cultural Kaleidoscope: A Mini Journey Through Belgium, India, and Iran

Campus focus

Did you know that the Manneken Pis has an entire wardrobe? That India has so many languages that they can barely be counted? Or that gasoline in Iran is cheaper than bottled drinks? All of these surprising facts are true, and more were revealed at the “International Cultural Kaleidoscope” held by the International and Mainland Student Guidance Section of the Office of International and Cross–Strait Affairs on November 19 at 6:00 p.m. in the Ching–Sheng Building. Three international students, Widad Rahmouni (Belgium), a first–year student in the Department of Chinese Penubarthi Guru Varun (India), a second–year doctoral student in Mechanical and Electro–Mechanical Engineering and Ali Kouhi (Iran), a senior in the English–taught Computer Science and Information Engineering Program, offered a lively cultural journey through personal stories and fascinating everyday details. The event attracted 36 faculty and students.

Rahmouni began by introducing Belgium’s geography, which spans approximately 30,000 km<sup>2</sup>, divided into the regions of Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia, each with distinct languages and cultures. When asked about the most popular attraction in Brussels, she immediately mentioned the famous Manneken Pis, noting that the tiny statue is dressed in nearly 100 different outfits annually, from football jerseys to traditional costumes—making him a miniature celebrity. She went on to highlight Belgium’s rich food culture, including National Belgian Fry Day, mussels–frites, and world–renowned Belgian beer, as well as beloved comic legends such as The Smurfs, The Adventures of Tintin, and Lucky Luke. Belgium’s many carnivals, such as those in Binche, Stavelot, and Malmedy, preserve traditional music and dance while strengthening community bonds.

India’s presenter, Penubarthi Guru Varun, brought the audience into the vibrant world of his homeland. He began by noting that there are over 1,300 languages spoken across India—and as many as 1,700 when local dialects are

included—with 22 recognized official languages, showcasing an astonishing degree of linguistic diversity. He also highlighted India’s global agricultural presence—for example, producing one-quarter of the world’s rice and being the leading producer of milk and spices. Speaking about celebrations, he joked, “In India, there are so many festivals that every day feels like preparing for a celebration!” with Diwali being the most iconic, marked by brilliant lights and fireworks that feel like a nationwide competition. On cuisine, he humorously added: “You won’t finish tasting all the flavors of India in your entire lifetime.” He also proudly declared, “Indian mangoes are really better than Taiwan’s!” which drew laughter across the room. Penubarthi Guru Varun further mentioned that yoga originated in India and has long been an integral part of Indian culture, encompassing everything from breathing practices to a way of life. The world now observes International Yoga Day on June 21, recognizing India’s cultural influence.

Ali Kouhi concluded the evening by introducing Iran through its exquisite traditional crafts and everyday life. A single handwoven carpet or miniature painting may take weeks to complete, reflecting the attention to detail of Iranian artisans. He also showcased an enameled copper plate handmade by his father, capturing everyone’s attention as they admired its artistry up close. He shared reality-check insights into Iranian living costs: gasoline costs about NT\$2 per liter natural gas is extremely inexpensive a full meal at a high-end restaurant costs around USD 10 the average monthly salary is only about USD 250. These contrasts paint a vivid picture of a society where daily costs and income structures differ significantly from those in Taiwan.

Participant Shiena Chailand, a senior from Indonesia majoring in Computer Science, expressed: “Listening to their stories felt like watching the Manneken Pis change costumes in Belgium, smelling spices on the streets of India, and sitting beside artisans weaving carpets in Iran.” The event was filled with laughter, curiosity, and wonder, as if everyone had set foot on a three-country cultural adventure—all in one evening.



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