

## **AIYC 2021: An Alternative, Improved ASEAN**

Transcript of the Keynote Lecture by

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The complete lecture is online at: <https://youtube.be/e0Zk3R9gexI>

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### **Summary**

Kasit Piromya divided the development of ASEAN into three historical phases.

The first period, from 1967 to 1991, covered the Cold War era when member countries were anti-communist, encouraged a capitalist open market economy, and saw drastic socio-economic development.

The second phase, from 1991 to 2008 after the Cold War, focused on multilateralism and regionalism, with ASEAN growing to include ten countries. There was much enthusiasm for openness, less protection, and liberalization.

The third part, started in 2008, and continues to the present. The ASEAN charter was signed, making the organization more rules-based and people-centered. We also saw the rise of China, with its assertiveness, and unilateral measures. Will ASEAN be able to continue to pursue its long-held declaration of neutrality, or should it join the Chinese or US sides?

We should make membership of ASEAN conditional on democratic principles and human rights. We must follow UN conventions on civil and political rights, and adhere to the spirit of the ASEAN charter.

Other socio-economic issues include connectivity, such as the free-flow of professionals and skilled individuals. We should start writing our own Southeast Asia history to ensure that it is not used as a political tool to incite hatred and discontent. There is a need for better planning to handle migrant workers and refugees. The internal tax laws of our member states must be harmonized.

In summary, we must become a more humane, unified, open community, not one based on fear and repression by the authorities. This will improve ASEAN's identity, respectability, and credibility on the world stage.

## Complete Lecture

First of all, thank you so much for the invitation, and secondly for the honor of allowing me to say a few words about ASEAN and its future prospects. I would also like to congratulate the three universities for a very successful organization of the speech competition, and wish you good health and safety. Enjoy these academic pursuits, and please consider acting as future advisors for the advancement of the ASEAN community.

I would like to invite all of you to join me in reviewing the evolution of ASEAN in the past 57 years. We should remind ourselves of what happened, what is happening, and what may be the future for a new ASEAN, or the transformation of the current ASEAN, to make it more relevant to the present geopolitical situation and demands of the planet post-COP26.

Let me divide the development of ASEAN into three phases to better understand its history, the current issues, and future challenges.

The first phase of ASEAN from 1967 to 1991 covers more or less the Cold War era. The original members of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines, and a few years later Brunei, were staunchly anti-communist. They also opted for a capitalist market economy that dealt with global trade in an open manner with the private economic sector. Until the end of the Cold War, ASEAN was very successful in opposing the growth of communism. We were able to combat the domino theory of communist expansion, and also repulse the occupation of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia. We worked together to bring East Cambodia under an UN interim-administration.

During this first period, along with the western world, ASEAN was able to complete drastic socio-economic development. We were thought to be the next group of tigers of the newly emerging economies, although we weren't all able to become developed countries except for Singapore perhaps. But we are still pursuing that goal, and all of us will eventually become developed economies.

We were all anti-communist, and opted for a capitalist open market economy, which reflected a unity of purpose, a cohesion of ideas, and a sense of purpose on the part of the ASEAN. We shared a common ideology of a free, anti-communistic, open market economy, that was part and parcel of the socio-economics of our respective countries, and of the ASEAN community. We should pride ourselves on our success between 1967 and 1991, not only in terms of internal development, but in overcoming territorial disputes through peaceful means that were the legacies of the colonial era. We met at the negotiating table, not at the borders for military skirmishes and clashes. The idea of peaceful settlement has become part of our DNA. This is a success story of not only working together but in overcoming disputes through negotiation.

The second phase from 1991 to 2007-2008 was post-Cold War, at the beginning of the era of globalization and telecommunication connectivity around the world. Within ASEAN there was a belief in multilateralism and regionalism. Trade or economic activities across borders were the key, and ASEAN was able to expand in this era of globalization.

ASEAN enlarged to include Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and eventually Myanmar, to become an entity of ten countries from the South East Asia region – a great achievement. What it signifies is that former enemies across ideological divides were able to come together, a reflection of ASEAN's ability to overcome past animosities and to move forward through reconciliation, friendship, and socio-economic development.

We were able to work together and put historical animosities in the past, in the refrigerator so to say. I must in that regard state my deep appreciation of the leadership of Vietnam. Since they joined ASEAN in 1997, the Vietnamese government has never raised the issue of the Cold War, especially US aircraft from Thailand bombing many parts of Vietnam. Somehow the Vietnamese were able to leave the past in the history books, and not allow past differences and atrocities to come to the fore and become obstacles.

This ability for ASEAN member states to work together should be appreciated by students and your contestants, especially at a time when historical events are being politicized in everyday life. We have to accept what went wrong in the past, but move forward together in a more positive and reconcilable manner.

From 1991 to 2007, we more or less achieved reconciliation, enlargement, and further integration of the ASEAN members. We should also recall the principle of the ASEAN initiative that more advanced members should help the less advanced ones to close their development and income gap. This is a noble undertaking that we haven't achieved as yet, but we have to strive to reduce the income disparity between Singapore and Laos or Cambodia. The gap must be closed as much as possible and will require us to continue collaborating into the future.

Now I move to the third phase of ASEAN, starting in 2007 or 2008, up to the present. I've chosen the years 2007/8 because of the ASEAN charter which meant that the ASEAN community became a rules-based organization. In the 40 years before, ASEAN was a loosely unified association without any rules. Most of the cooperation, activities, and agreements were more or less ad hoc. With the ASEAN charter, the ten member states now have commitments and obligations that are binding. This is very important since rules mean that we must act together.

What are some of the elements of this rule-based community? If you read the ASEAN charter, you will see the words democracy and human rights, and by implication participation. The policy direction is that ASEAN must be people-centered and employ centrality. ASEAN has essentially committed itself to whatever we do together involving the people at its core; people must come first. What this implies, if you link people-centrality to human rights and democracy, is that people must be protected and their human rights and freedoms promoted. For people to be really at the core means that whatever decisions are made the people must be consulted. There must be a consultative and participatory ASEAN community.

ASEAN centrality means that whatever is going on in the Indo-Pacific or Asia-Pacific regions, ASEAN must be in the driver's seat, be the intellectual initiator, have a voice. This will ensure that the Asia Pacific will be a region of peace, prosperity, and security.

We've had so many tasks to carry out since 2008, and they're not only affected by what's going on inside the ASEAN community. As was the case during 1967 to 1991 and 1991 to 2008, we must be aware of the international environment and context.

During the Cold War, we had the backing and the security umbrella of the western world, especially from the US with its seven fleet bases in Honolulu, Hawaii. A US presence provided stability to the whole region, and encouraged the socio-economic development of every country in the region, especially China which started to move away from a purely state-led economy towards state capitalism in combination with private capitalism. China achieved a tremendous socio-economic change.

From 1991 to 2007/8, there was an enthusiasm for openness, less protection, liberalization, and regionalism. We saw the rise of APEC, the ASEM Summit, and ASEAN, which entered multiple dialogue partnerships with major countries around the world without undue concern over whether its partners were authoritarian or democratic. It didn't matter because socio-economic and cross-border trade and economic activities were the name of the game. 1991 to 2008 was a period of optimism and hope, with robust economic activities at all levels of the private sector and government.

But after 2008, and especially at the beginning of 2012, the international and Asia Pacific context started to change with the new political leadership in Beijing. The new leaders declared that they would like to redress China's position in the world, having been humiliated during the 19th and early 20th centuries. China wanted to be number one again, a position it held before the 16th century when Europeans began conquering many parts of the world, and humiliating major countries in the Asia Pacific. India was colonized, Japan was forced to open its country, and China was forced to accept many treaties and agreement with the western world and later Japan. It was invaded and occupied by foreign forces.

The new Chinese leadership, with renewed confidence, wealth, and power, wants to take back its past position. It intends to rid the Asia-Pacific region of western influence, and push the US out of the region. It wants the region to become a sort of Chinese-led order, which implies a Chinese wish to be a hegemonic power.

The US did somewhat take up the challenge by declaring that it would not depart the region. The latest move by the US is the declaration by President Biden that if Taiwan is attacked by China then the US will come to its defense as a treaty ally and fellow democracy.

The US has also started to intensify bilateral security relationships with South Korea, Japan, Australia, India, and to a lesser extent with Singapore and Vietnam which has had many territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea.

The latest moves were the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) made up of the US with Australia, India and Japan, and last September the US, the UK, and Australia formed a security, technological, and industrial alliance called AUKUS.

All of this shows us that the US has declared to the world, and sent a message to China, that the US will not go away as China would like. The US will remain entrenched and even expand its alliances with the countries that I have just mentioned.

The rosy picture of globalization, economic cooperation, multilateralism, and regionalism that has developed since the end of the Cold War up to 2008 or 2011 is no longer that conducive. We can see this in the rise of China, with its assertiveness, and unilateral measures such as the militarization of islets and islands in the South China Sea in spite of a court ruling by the international Permanent Court of Arbitration Court in favor of the Philippines. China, as a major superpower and member of the UN Security Council, rejected the court's decision, which doesn't bode well for the Indo-Pacific or Asia-Pacific regions because of the rivalry between the US and China. Both sides intend to increase their military armaments, no one is backing down, and are instead trying to push its position further.

Now let me come back to the ASEAN community. During the Cold War, we took sides with the western world and were steadfastly anti-communist against forces led by the Soviet Union and China. During the first twenty years of the era of globalization, everyone was happy because of an expansion of cross-border economic activities. Socio-economic development was the primary goal, but now with the rise and assertive position of China, with the US acceptance of the challenge of China, the question is now how will the ASEAN community change? It can no longer just do nothing. Will ASEAN be able to continue to pursue its long-held declaration of the principle of neutrality, or should it join the Chinese or US sides?

To answer this question, we have to ask ourselves what kind of entity an ASEAN community will be in the region? At the moment, we're unlike the European Union where membership is based on democratic requirements. A member of the European Union must be a democracy, must enshrine human rights, must have a good governance, and promote anti-corruption. Membership in the current ASEAN community has no such requirements for the type of political regime a member state should uphold.

There is an ongoing confrontation and rivalry between two ideologies – on one side democracy led by the US, and on the other a sort of totalitarian, authoritarian regime led by China. Where does ASEAN stand? ASEAN members have signed many of the UN conventions on political, social, economic rights, human rights, refugee rights, child right and so on. Also, the spirit of the ASEAN charter is very much in the direction of openness, democracy, people's participation, and the protection and promotion of human rights. But, the reality within the ASEAN community is somewhat different. Brunei is an absolute monarchy, as are Cambodia, Thailand, and Malaysia. In Cambodia, the monarchy is constrained by politics, and Thailand has had a lot of difficulties with military interventions in politics. Malaysia has a problem with rising Islamism, and Myanmar has been an outright military regime for 60 of the last 70 years of its independence from British colonialism. The latest coup d'état on the February 1st is a cause for concern not only for the Myanmar people but all of the ASEAN community. Meanwhile, Indonesia and the Philippines seem to be advancing in terms of democratization.

This mixed behavior is occurring at the same time that the US is calling loudly for more cooperation with fellow democracies on the security side, and I've already mentioned the World Court and AUKUS.

On December 9th, President Biden began organizing a conference of democracies, with 100 countries planning to participate. Only three countries from ASEAN have been invited –Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Unfortunately, Thailand and Singapore haven't been invited because they are viewed as semi-democratic. This should remind us that most ASEAN members are not part of the democratic world club. Secondly, it shows that the US is once again becoming more vocal about associating with democracies, and again making a distinction between democratic and non-democratic regimes.

At the same time, the European Union just released Indo-Pacific strategic guidelines, and some of its member countries, such as the Netherlands, France, and Germany, have their own national strategic papers about the Indo-Pacific.

The UK, having left the EU, has its own Indo-Pacific strategic policy direction, and has sent an aircraft carrier to the Indo-Pacific region, and joined AUKUS with Australia and the US. This means that the UK will be present in the area for years to come, not only in terms of economic and development aid, but in terms of military hardware. It has more or less declared itself to be in opposition to the authoritarian regime and the one-party totalitarian model being propagated by the Chinese leadership.

Concerning the future of ASEAN, there must be discussions in every circle of the ASEAN academic world, and among politicians and bureaucrats about whether we should make the membership of ASEAN conditional on democratic principles, universal values of democracy, and human rights. ASEAN cannot remain a mixed entity – half authoritarian, full authoritarian/half democratic, or full democratic. With so many differences in political ideology, outlook, and passions, we'll be unable to handle global challenges. By extension, ASEAN centrality will become a joke, a non-entity, insignificant.

Many ASEAN members were not invited to Washington on December 9th because most of us are not democracies. If ASEAN wants to be involved we have to be something together; we cannot be half totalitarian, authoritarian, and democratic. We have to agree to move in the direction of our commitments, to follow UN conventions on civil and political rights, and to adhere to the spirit of the ASEAN charter.

Should 650 million ASEAN citizens move towards democracy, or are we going to allow our governments to be authoritarian and suppress us? That's the primary question that we have to ask ourselves, because we cannot go on like this.

Because ASEAN embodies so many differences in terms of political ideas and regimes, we don't have a cohesive position on the Myanmar crisis, or a joint position on the South China Sea concerning the unilateralism of China, and no single viewpoint on the Chinese activities on the upper Mekong to the detriment of at least two major ASEAN countries, Cambodia and Vietnam, situated at the end of the Mekong river before it flows into the South China Sea. We have to form

common positions on these important issues for the region and internationally, which must start from the basis of a common ideology.

Currently, we don't have a common ideology like we had in the 1960, 1970s, and 1980s against communism. This credo let us form a movement to help the international community pressure the Vietnamese to leave Cambodia in the 1980s. The UN ran an interim administration in Cambodia to turn it away from civil war and occupation by foreigners into a democratic country with a constitution. Whether this system was abused later is another question; it's for the Cambodian people to keep working to formalize their country's democratization process.

We helped our Cambodian friends, our Laotian friends, and our Vietnamese friends to obtain freedom from French colonialism. But when the French left, the people were confronted by the authoritarianism of the Communist parties in Vietnam and Lao.

Why should a government subjugate its own people after it had been trying so hard to get rid of foreigners, whether it was the British, Dutch, or French? Leaders have no right to suppress their own people, and this issue must be addressed by ASEAN as a people-centered entity. It cannot be people-centered as long as some of the people in its member states, including myself as a Thai, live under a semi-military authoritarian regime without a democratic constitution.

A blossoming democracy was one of the reasons why Thailand in the 1980s and 1990s, and especially in the 1990s, was the delight of the free world. But in this century, after two coup d'états, President Biden didn't even invite Thailand to the summit conference on democracy. It's a shame for the country, and the culprits are the military juntas and political authoritarians. They use the excuse of elections to control the country in an authoritarian manner.

This is something that ASEAN must work on, to make the organization fully democratic at the community and national levels.

Another point, putting political concerns aside, is that there are many outstanding socio-economic issues that we must overcome quickly.

One of them is the question of connectivity. We should not have to deal with such unwieldy immigration and custom procedures between Singapore and Malaysia, Malaysia and Thailand, Thailand and Myanmar, Thailand and Laos, Thailand and Cambodia, Cambodia and Vietnam, Laos and Vietnam, and so on. We should be moving much faster on cross-border facilitation to make things as free-flowing as possible. We shouldn't be using passports to travel between the ten countries. Instead we should have an ASEAN card, or something similar, to encourage the liberalization of the free-flow of professionals and skilled individuals. It would also facilitate academic exchanges to help upgrade our research and development goals.

Most of our regional histories, as well as those of individual countries, have been written by the French, British, the Dutch, and the Americans. It's about time that our historians and archaeologists got together to write our own Southeast Asia history. At the same time, we must review what the history textbooks say about Thai-Vietnam, Thai-Cambodia, and Thai-Laos

relations because most of them place too much emphasis on antagonistic, unforgivable episodes. We should learn from the reconciliations between the French and Germans, and the Germans and Poles. They came to terms with history, accepted what happened, and have progressed beyond it. We still have to do that: clarify the history textbooks, accept what happened, even apologize, and then move on. We should not use history as a political tool to incite hatred, discontentment, and distrust among our children and citizens.

Another socio-economic issue that ASEAN must work on is a master plan for migrant workers. There should be agreed obligations for the sending, transit, and receiving countries. Singapore has one of the best systems for migrant workers, which we should study. We should also work with international labor organizations to formulate a more standardized migrant worker blueprint. It will look at issues such as screening, acceptance, and looking after the well-being of migrants including their family members. We should consider these people as a community, not in terms of exploitation and unequal treatment between national and foreign workers.

We should also have a master plan for refugees. For example, Malaysia and Thailand are being confronted with the Rohingyas, and occasionally also receive political exiles from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. Political exiles should not be sent back to their home country when they oppose the government. We must have a set of rules that reflect the moral righteousness of our respective countries and societies.

Another point that we should work on while we are transforming ASEAN into a democracy is the harmonization of internal tax laws. Differences in taxes can lead to smuggling. For example, disparities in price and taxation on palm oil between Malaysia and Thailand has encouraged smuggling of Malaysian palm oil and benzene into Thailand. ASEAN must harmonize these internal laws to overcome corruption and smuggling, otherwise we cannot become a real community.

These are some of the issues that the ASEAN leadership must work on. In summary, one is the enhancement of the ASEAN internal market to make it as unified as possible. Also we need to persuade various political regimes to become more democratic in order to address the notion of a people-centered ASEAN. Such changes will also improve the identity, respectability, and credibility of ASEAN in the eyes of the international community. We must be a humane, open community, not one based on fear, repression, and suppression by the authorities.

I will now be more than happy to entertain some questions. Thank you very much.



## Questions and Answers

### Question 1

How can ASEAN's rules on centrality, human rights, and people-centered rights be reconciled with growing Chinese hegemony?

Most of us, some 650 million people, have experienced colonialism, and we emancipated ourselves, became independent from European rules, and to a certain extent American control in the Philippines. If we were able to liberate ourselves from the western world, why should we let ourselves become a semi-vassal state of China?

Secondly, after regaining our liberty, why should we go along with a totalitarian socio-political Chinese model? General Aung San of Myanmar, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta of Indonesia, and many Filipino leaders, fought for freedom, although some of the later leaders turned around and suppressed their people which makes it very difficult to create a people-centered society. Change must occur inside each ASEAN country, and once we become more liberated, more open, more people-centered, and more democratic then we will have nothing to fear from Chinese influence and hegemonic tendencies.

We have to keep telling our political leaders that they must honor the principle of people-centrality; the people are the masters not the slaves of the political leadership. The leaders must serve us, and we must not blindly follow their instructions.

We have to keep on pursuing the democratization process to make the concept of people-centered a reality, and not just rhetoric for speeches or joint statements that looks good but in reality means nothing.

The ASEAN community is still very much a bureaucratic entity because the bureaucracy and the political leadership don't often talk to the ASEAN people about the decisions they make. There's no venue for consultation, which suggests that the ASEAN inter-parliamentary assembly based in Jakarta should be updated. That assembly, which represents political parties from the ASEAN countries, could become more democratic by inviting NGOs, academics, think tanks, the private sector, farmer associations, labor associations, and labor unions to join. These groups should be able to talk at the ASEAN assembly.

During ASEAN ministry meetings or leaders' summit meetings, professional associations and academics should be invited to submit proposals. They can help governments to work on the democratization process or to realize people-centered ideas.

What is needed is a push from ordinary people, along with renewed political vision by the leaders and bureaucrats who should be serving the people.

## **Question 2**

I would like to continue with a related question. Using the EU or US as models of democratic organizations show the weakness of these models. Both the EU and US are in the process of being torn apart by internal differences. Isn't a Chinese model stronger?

Every system has differences, but how you handle those differences is another matter. In the Chinese model, dissention seems to mean that you are either killed or imprisoned. Fortunately, no president will last forever even if they are very strong now. There are certainly people in mainland China who would like to be free. A well-known case is the Chinese tennis star, Peng Shuai, who was abused by a senior government official. She raised her voice and then disappeared for a couple of weeks until international pressure persuaded the Chinese to allow her to communicate with the world.

In the western system, differences can be aired in the open, and you aren't abducted or forced into silence. The supreme court of the US, the supreme courts of the members of the European Union, and the court of justice for the European Union are known for their high integrity and fairness.

We have even seen in some ASEAN countries, such as the Philippines and Thailand, evidence of extrajudicial killings. This is standard authoritarian practice, which employs majority absolutism in parliament to suppress its people.

I prefer a society where problems can be addressed openly. Indeed, I'm a bit concerned about the situation in Thailand when young people come out onto the streets to demand things that aren't conducive to the establishment. They don't receive reasoned answers or explanations, but police force and court cases for disturbing the peace. We should be able to protest, have our voice heard in a venue where there can be open discussion, rather than a secretive party decision as in the Chinese model.

## **Question 3**

In your opinion, are the risks of opening the country to foreign visitors while the COVID 19 situation is unresolved worth the potential benefits of increased foreign capital inflow?

I would prefer to complete the process of vaccination to at least 70 percent of the population of each country, so I don't agree with my government opening up Thailand to tourism until the first and the second vaccinations have reached that percentage of the 67 million population.

Secondly, why should political leaders only think of income from tourism when there are so many economic sectors that could reduce the economic decline due to COVID 19. I have given interviews, participated in panels, and written articles which explain that I would prefer the Thai government to use the budget, and money they have been borrowing to the tune of billions of dollars, on infrastructure development to employ as many people as possible. At the same time,

the government should also put money into research and development of the green and circular economies.

There are many economic activities that we could carry out instead of only relying on the inflow of Chinese, Indian and Middle Easterners tourists. That is the easy way out, but risky because the COVID situation is still ongoing. The government shouldn't focus all of its attention on tourism, putting all of its eggs in one basket, when it could become a big investor in the country because of a large budget and the ability to borrow more money than the private sector.

With climate change, COVID 19, and the fact that Thailand is becoming a middle income country like Malaysia, we cannot keep relying on sunset industries. We cannot remain an assembly nation, but must use our brains. For example, Singapore is taking the lead in biotechnology, in energy conservation, and in alternative and renewable energies.

Our leaders have committed to the Paris Agreement, to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to COP26 in Glasgow. In that sense, we cannot go on running the country as a tourism promotion.

We also have to make a distinction between tourist inflow and foreign direct investment. Foreign direct investment will not come to Thailand, Malaysia, or Indonesia until we move towards a BCG green circular economy.

Thailand has become the assembly plant for Japanese, Korean, and European cars over the last 50 years. But this is moving to neighboring countries, particularly Vietnam, and we cannot go on solely manufacturing electronic parts. We have to move up the value-added ladder, and Singapore is leading the way. Why can't Thailand and Malaysia follow suit?

Foreign direct investment will only come in when we have a new economic development plan based on SDGs and on the green and the circular blue economies. This will require intensive agricultural practice and agro-industry that instead of focusing on fertilizers and chemicals is more ecologically oriented.

ASEAN requires a new social and economic development plan based on Planet Earth sustainability. We have to do away with benzene, but I haven't heard any announcement from the Thai government about phasing out fossil fuels.

Also, electricity in Thailand is mostly produced from coal, and we have to import 80% of it from abroad. The government has still not proposed any strategies for phasing out coal in the next ten years, but we must refocus on alternative and renewable energy. All of us in ASEAN receive plenty of sun, at least ten hours a day, and we have waves and wind. We have waste that could be turned into fuel, but there is no collective policy among ASEAN countries, and no national individual directives. Only Singapore has developed a plan along these lines, but Singapore is a city state so it's easier to decide and implement things. Most of us are agricultural nations, with more urbanization, and need more infrastructure.

We have to formulate policy for these new economies which do not depend on know-how from China and the western world. We have to do more research, with ASEAN universities working

together more on the scientific side, as they do on humanitarian and social issues. For example, Indonesia has an aircraft industry in Bandung, so we could work together to improve spare parts exchange, and carry out electric battery research and development. There's a lot of opportunities for research on sea wave and solar energy, and we could propose more green oriented agricultural practices that use less chemicals. Unfortunately, our leaders, our economic research institutes, and the private sector have not had any substantive discussions about these issues. Everyone has been talking about opening up the country for tourism.

Why should we open the country at all when tourism is dependent on 30-40% of Chinese visitors, and the Chinese aren't allowing people to come here? Meanwhile, the whole of Europe is suffering from COVID 19. Opening up is unrealistic, but it's good political rhetoric.

A related point is that Thailand is still enforcing its emergency law. How can they continue with that law while opening the country to tourists? Naturally, the government has been accused of using the emergency law to curtail freedom of expression. In other words, a negative outcome has been created because our leaders didn't consider the situation deeply enough, without extensive discussions among all the stakeholders, including more cooperation with Malaysia and Singapore.

The academic world could contribute many more ideas to our economic development, and academic freedom is very important. I would urge all professors and lecturers to provide recommendations to the government because most politicians live day-to-day based on popularity and votes. They don't have the time to look at even medium-term prospects for the country.

#### **Question 4**

What advice would you give to ASEAN youth wishing to enter the global workforce and build a secure economy in post-pandemic ASEAN?

First is English language proficiency. Second is computer literacy. Third is a knowledge of global issues, requirements, norms, and practices. Whatever you're going to do in the future, you have to know the global rules pertaining to sustainability and corporate social responsibility. You need these skills in order to work in a conducive environment and produce according to international requirements. You cannot just produce anything you like without being knowledgeable about SDGs and sustainability requirements.

If you have computer skills then you can even sell your ideas via your phone since you're connected to the world. If you're creative and computer savvy, then there are more chances to link to the international economy and promote yourself.

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