

ASEAN's Three Decades of Regionalism: Success or Failure?*

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In the future, if we would like ASEAN to have a human face, I think this must begin with the people. People's power, like that which used to prevail in the Philippines or Thailand, now has disappeared; we have to campaign for the revival of this power.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was set up on August 8, 1967, with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration by the five original members, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Its primary purpose was to accelerate economic growth and promote peace and security in the region. Brunei, after becoming independent, joined ASEAN in 1984. Vietnam became a member in 1995 and lastly, Myanmar and Laos were admitted into ASEAN in 1997.

The 30th anniversary of ASEAN presented an occasion for its performance review. Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prof Vitit Muntarbhorn, Lecturer at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Law, Dr Surachai



The seminar was held at the Sanya Dhammasakdi Auditorium, Thammasat University, on December 18, 1997.

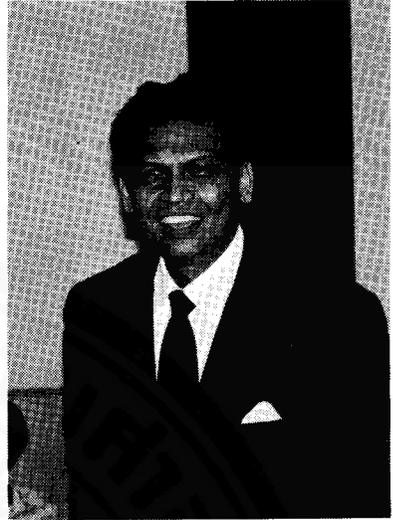
Sirikrai, Thammasat University's Acting Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs and Mr Kavi Chongkittavorn, Editor of *The Nation*, compared their notes at a seminar entitled *ASEAN's Three Decades of Regionalism: Success or Failure?*. Excerpts from their seminar presentations appear below.

Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Royal Thai Government

I feel quite honored to be here today for an exchange of views and observations on the 30-year development of ASEAN. We will see whether Thailand and other members have succeeded or failed, benefited or lost, so that we can adjust our movement towards a better future.

* Translated from Thai into English by Pairoj Poompradit, a freelance translator
Photo by Thammasat University Public Relations Division, *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*

I think the first question likely to be asked is: When ASEAN was set up 30 years ago, what was happening in this region? The situation then was: 1) Colonialism was retreating from Southeast Asia; 2) the Cold War was boiling hot; and, 3) we were facing rapid changes due to new technology and new expectations arising from new lifestyles that were emerging worldwide, particularly in our region. As the colonial powers were leaving, the pattern of security and stability building in this region was also changing rapidly. Frankly speaking, the Southeast Asian Association Treaty Organization (SEATO) was going to die. Could it be still possible to use external forces to guarantee internal stability and security? Was the containment policy in use after World War II, until 1967, still effective? The turbulence at that time forced Southeast Asian countries to pull together and think of a containment policy among themselves. This eventually led to an agreement as set forth in the Bangkok Declaration. This was the birth of ASEAN.



Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Now 30 years have passed. If there were no ASEAN, what would have happened? I suppose that disputes would have still abounded and stability may have not been secured. ASEAN has given rise to regional cooperation in economic, political, cultural and social affairs. Also, it has created an emerging sense of solidarity and facilitated effective dialogues.

The unity at present, I believe, will open up opportunities to explore further collaboration. Globalization has presented us new challenges and as the tides of change are so strong we can no longer put up a solo fight. Amid waves of economic investment and liberalization thrusts, solitary resistance or individual bargaining will never win. After all, to stand up and accommodate the global changes, I think, is the best available strategy. We ought to adapt ourselves to new challenges. What our leaders in the past tried to foresee is what we are now faced with. And we have found that we prefer a collective encounter to an individual strategy - standing, fighting and encountering alone.

The current problems are no longer of an ideological nature. Drug trafficking, cross-border terrorism, illicit migration, illegal immigration, environmental and other social problems are new forms of security and stability issues. They are not within the old ideological framework. Thus, the traditional structure of security and stability is out of date and can no longer give us the answer. Banding together is an effort by ASEAN to respond to the changing circumstances. Today Thailand takes the lead in thinking out this new architecture and approach, to cope with the faster and fiercer forces of change in the coming decade.

Looking back, I see with pride the many constructive efforts of our regional diplomacy. Thais should be proud of the fact that several initiatives were of Thai origin. Former Thai Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman, was one of the founders of ASEAN, while former Thai Prime Minister, Anand Panyarachun, was the driving force behind the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) established in early 1993.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)¹, founded in July 1994, acts like a 'clearing house', not only for ASEAN members but also others with interests in Southeast Asia, including Pacific nations whose transport needs link them to this region. Every country has the right to join the forum to address issues, raise questions, make observations and express concern or hope. The aim is to build confidence among countries which have interests in or realize the significance of Southeast Asia. Today ARF is recognized as an important mechanism for alleviating fears and doubts in the region.

What ASEAN is now trying to do is to engage the military in new missions. From their traditional roles in suppression and fighting for sovereign protection, they are now being encouraged to become more involved in civic activities, such as rescue and rehabilitation operations in the event of natural disasters or catastrophic accidents.

I remember telling a funny story during the first ARF meeting in Thailand. The story was about the United Nations. Everybody thought it was a joke to bring people from the world over to sit down together and talk about solving problems, conflicts and wars. It was impossible. But Winston Churchill said, "It's better to jaw-jaw than to war-war" - that is to say, a verbal fight is better than war. As the pronunciation of ARF gives a sound like dog's bark, I said, "It's better to ARF-ARF than to rave-rave". At present, ARF is an agency capable of building confidence in our region. Keen to join this gathering are actors like Russia, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the US and the EU, as well as India.

Next is the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)², the brainchild of Thai Deputy Premier Supachai Panichpakdi and Singaporean Premier Goh Chok Tong. Back then, we realized our status as medium-sized countries and economies. In this context, ASEAN countries worked within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Economic Commission (APEC), while the US had their North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Europe was developing their European Union (EU). As Europe was somewhat afraid of being barred from APEC, or of being left out of the dialogue between the US and the Asia-Pacific region, it wanted some involvement with Southeast Asia but had no idea how to start. Mr Supachai and Mr Goh Chok Tong suggested a ministerial meeting between Europe and ASEAN. The idea was developed into the first ASEM session in Bangkok between March 1-2, 1996. Some significant concepts and processes originated here in this region; this is what we can take pride in. And today these processes are still in place.

¹ ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM (ARF) or the ASEAN Conference on Politics and Security in the Asia-Pacific Region was the result of the Fourth ASEAN Summit. The first ARF meeting was held in Bangkok on July 25, 1994 and attended by 17 countries from the Asia-Pacific region. The ARF is designed to be a forum for strengthening international confidence among nations concerned with facilitating peace, stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

² ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) is an international forum linking Asia and Europe through the instrumental role of ASEAN.

ASEAN is now in the slow process of transition and transformation. This requires common decision, joint consultation and collective encounter. Thirty years of experience has nurtured and developed ideas into reality. Now we have a new culture - an ASEAN-style which embraces flexibility and caring. This ASEAN working style has been teased or ridiculed by outsiders, but it is the ASEAN way built on an accumulation of experience and familiarity. The ASEAN personality is imbued with flexible accommodation, but no harshness, rigidity or confrontation. ASEAN has become a mutually supportive organization. This is a typical working style that could be described as the underlying strength of ASEAN. Some ASEAN concepts are strange and not widely understood. For example, ASEAN adheres to the principle of consensus; no decision will be made if there is just one vote of dissent. But when they actually face a contentious issue, they say flexible consensus is acceptable - no need for a unanimous vote. Only ASEAN could think up this sort of procedure, and certainly, some people see it as a weak point.

ASEAN acts within the framework of the mutual interests of all parties, or at least most of them. What is mutually beneficial is adopted and this provides energy for collective action. If something cannot be done due to conflicts, those conflicts will be restrained and kept from meddling in the whole ASEAN process. This is another typical ASEAN characteristic. I understand, however, that global forces will not allow ASEAN to radically deviate from international norms. Some members may feel reluctant to act on an issue, but the globalization process will force all nations to be more open, more democratic and have more respect for human rights.

On economic, trade and investment cooperation, ASEAN has developed a concept called 'Minus X'. This process allows members to reserve their 'agreement' within a 'majority resolution'. Members not ready to adopt a resolution will be grouped into the 'Minus X' category. For example, members may accept the premise of a majority resolution but are temporarily exempt from certain conditions of that resolution. Some practices adopted by the five original members, thus, may not be observed by Myanmar, Laos or Vietnam, because as recent members they may need more time to get ready to implement certain policies or procedures. Such a concept would never emerge within EU or NAFTA relations. Consensus remains consensus, but the ASEAN way is flexible. Its 'Minus X' policy enables all members to stay together even if they disagree on certain moves. This is the jointly cultivated working style or working culture that has kept ASEAN alive and well, to the point that it is now widely recognised as a successful regional model.

At a meeting in Indonesia, during the last Cabinet, Thailand tabled a document illustrating *ASEAN Vision 2020*. The term 'Vision 2020' has a dual meaning - an outlook for the next two decades and also, a person with clear sight, good vision. I think Thai leaders or our Foreign Ministry officials who initiated this notion understand this sort of psychology. Thailand tries to be a moral force, an ethical force - in other words, a leader in promoting universally accepted social standards within the international community. And I suppose the reality is that this is the only decent alternative; we cannot favor war, aggression or

exploitation. Internally it may be another matter, but as a compassionate society, as an Eastern society, our foreign policy has to reflect these characteristics.

As the government of a country imbued with the values and traditions of Eastern civilization, we have no choice but to be compassionate. We would like to see “a community of caring nations” inscribed in the *Vision 2020*. Through our political experience, we are aware that to effectively reflect these things we need greater participation by the people. We insisted that the term ‘open societies’ must appear in the document, but several countries did not agree. At first, ‘open societies’ was part of the ‘political aspiration’ section of the Vision. However, following rounds of bargaining, the term was admitted into the ‘social section’. Resistance was, therefore, partially reduced.

In the final round of working sessions, I stood firm that, if necessary, our Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai would bring this issue to the nine countries’ meeting to seek a final decision. Once they saw our firmness - a bit different from the usual ASEAN style, they came up with an innovative idea - in ASEAN style, of course. They suggested the use of some qualifiers to define or soften the term ‘open societies’. Originally the document read, “We see vibrant and open ASEAN societies.” They said that was not possible because several members comprehended ‘open societies’ in the domain of trade. One of our Cabinet members said to me that this was a tacit admission of having ‘closed societies’. So the words ‘open’ and ‘closed’ suddenly became ideological issues. But they found the way out, in ASEAN style, by retaining “We see vibrant and open ASEAN societies” and adding “consistent with their respective national identities”. Thus, there could be an open society in the Thai, Singaporean or Malaysian tradition. After the meeting, we sat back and thought about what we had lost.

Firstly, the term ‘open societies’ had survived the debate. And secondly, we were forced to consider that democracy actually does come in different shapes and colors; it is not the same for all European countries or for all Asian societies. So we have “...open ASEAN societies consistent with their respective national identities”. So what had we really lost? At least ‘open societies’ had been stated and everything proceeded smoothly until we finally secured our *ASEAN Vision 2020*. This was the first-ever event where ASEAN had worked together and decided on a road map for the future. And pretty clearly, depending on your interpretation, they were committed to open societies. So we have agreed upon the issue and I believe it will be a basis for further endeavours. We feel that our foreign policy, our thinking and diplomacy should be along this line. That is, to act as a moral force, giving words of caution; an ethical leadership reminding others of the right path.

Amid the current economic troubles, ASEAN is working together to encourage intra-ASEAN trade. Formerly, ASEAN countries traded largely with the US, Japan and Europe, but recently trade among ASEAN states has increased dramatically. We have agreed that intra-regional trade is a way to reduce dependence on outsiders. But this is an open regionalism, and not a closed bloc. ASEAN still has to rely on trade with non-members as well.

We have also tried to convince the world's major economies that if the problems in this region remained unsolved, purchasing power and market demand will shrink. Economic disorder will erupt and spread its effects worldwide. Therefore, our appeal for help is not that of a beggar. We told the superpowers they had a stake in the Asian crisis. Their sale and production of goods, including employment, depend on these economies - a stance that Prime Minister Chuan has consistently raised with key foreign players.



**Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn, Faculty of Law,
Chulalongkorn University**

As the first letter of ASEAN is 'A', I would like to relate a story about a scientist whose name begins with this letter. Yes, he is Albert Einstein. After seriously spending three days preparing questions for his students' mid-term exam, he handed a paper to his secretary. Shocked by what she saw, the secretary told her boss that the questions were exactly the same as last year's. Einstein replied, "That's right. But this time I've changed the answers! "

Prof Vitit Muntarbhorn,

Likewise, ASEAN is a familiar seminar topic for the people in this particular circle. The discussions today, however, will probably give us different answers for our thinking towards the next decade. I think the questions concerning ASEAN's development should be answered in lawyer's style. Lawyers never say 'yes' or 'no', but 'It depends'. It depends on which dimension of ASEAN you look at.

The *1967 Bangkok Declaration* on which ASEAN is founded contains seven objectives. Among these, I would like to note that there is no mention of politics. However, it has become the most successful aspect of ASEAN. In addition to the political dimension, we have to also look further into other areas. Firstly, confrontations were prevailing among members when ASEAN was formed in 1967. Malaysia did not like Indonesia, which was also disliked by Singapore. And Singapore was in dispute with Malaysia, which in turn had conflicts with Brunei. Malaysia and the Philippines disputed control over the Sabah territory which is now part of Malaysia. But ASEAN brought about an accommodation and a cessation of these confrontations. Secondly, ASEAN managed to set up a defence line to protect ASEAN from external threats. You know what the threats were in 1967 (namely the Cold War which was playing out its ideological battle in the jungles of Vietnam and other parts of the world). Fortunately we were safe and sound. The 1960s and 1970s were decades of war, so ASEAN was beneficial to us by offering a containment of that danger.

A third success came in the form of resolving the Cambodian problems. The Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975 and was toppled by Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin in 1978. As a result, the Khmer Rouge and Prince (King) Sihanouk promptly approached Thailand for help. From 1978 to 1991, the legitimate

government of Cambodia was the exiled government, supported by Thailand and ASEAN and recognized by the United Nations (UN). This was a great political success for ASEAN and Thailand. The UN resolutions recognizing the exiled government were initiated by ASEAN. In 1991 there came the Paris Peace Accord which ASEAN also supported. Regrettably there was a *semi-coup d'etat* in Cambodia recently. Again, ASEAN will play a key constructive role in monitoring the forthcoming elections in that troubled country.

The evolution of ASEAN in the area of regional security includes the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994, with the purpose of policy initiative, confrontation prevention and creation of confidence, crisis measures and contingency aid. There has been dialogue with Europe via the ASEM meeting in Bangkok. ASEAN also proceeded to cooperate with Northeast Asian nations, namely Japan, South Korea and China. Since they have no regional organization, we dealt with them bilaterally. These were wise efforts.

I believe, however, that the political dimension of ASEAN does have one tiny flaw. In the past two years, we have worked to formulate a treaty for the *Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone*. But we have yet to gain recognition and commitment from the superpowers as they are afraid that the treaty is too broad and may affect their rights regarding the movement of ships over the continental shelf. So there are certain flaws in the political image; but overall I still give a pretty good score of 75 out of the full 100 per cent.

Coming to the second dimension - economic cooperation. Nothing really happened on this front during the decade between 1967 and 1976. After that, some projects emerged and produced mixed results of both success and failure. Four major schemes arising from post-1976 ASEAN meetings are as follows.

1. *ASEAN Industrial Projects (AIP)* There are some large-scale projects, like the potash project proposed for Thailand, failed before implementation, as did projects in other countries. A few projects are underway.
2. *ASEAN Industrial Complementation (AIC)* Scheme aimed at the automotive parts industry. The project has been doing rather well but it's on too small of a scale.
3. *ASEAN Industrial Joint Venture (AIJV)* Scheme involves the participation of the private sector. This is a pretty good project because it encourages private sector companies in different ASEAN countries to work cooperatively thereby increasing their flexibility and efficiency.
4. *ASEAN Preferential Trading Arrangements (PTA)* which has laid the groundwork for Asean Free Trade Area (AFTA), but has not been as quite successful in its own right due to the large number of tariff exceptions in each country.

Following the PTA, the 1992 Summit in Singapore gave birth to AFTA. The current framework has reduced the time frame from the original 15 to 10 years for import-tariff reductions to 0-5 per cent. Implementation is divided into fast and normal tracks. AFTA also has many exceptions. Some members such as

Indonesia and the Philippines have yet to agree on rice duties. So when studying AFTA's rules, we also have to look at the exceptions which are sometimes broader than the rules.

Other related issues should also be considered, for instance, the degree of liberalization in the service sector. There have been several initiatives on this matter. With regard to investment, the ASEAN Industrial Area is currently underway with the aim of reducing investor obstacles. In the service sector, there is the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA).

On the financial front, I think things are not so good but it is unfair to label ASEAN as the root cause. Financial failure seemingly stemmed from hollow systems inside and spread out across the entire ASEAN region, while external factors from the globalization process also had both positive and negative roles to play. ASEAN did initiate a number of programs such as SWOP arrangements several years ago, but this common fund for financial crises was not large enough. And just last month agreement was reached on the *Manila Framework*, calling for more surveillance, more intra-ASEAN assistance and more support from the IMF. This framework will become more important in the future. But the financial harm is spreading and cannot be contained at this point. If drastic measures are not taken, we are going to fail and fall.

Let's go to the fourth dimension - social, cultural and environmental fields. There is a cross-border environmental cooperation project, but when smoke and haze from Indonesian forest fires pervaded neighboring countries, everybody just stood still. Who would fight the interest groups close to the ruling power? On the social front, there is a comprehensive range of plans but relevant programs are rather shoddy. I have long waited for children's programs. ASEAN has plans but tends to lack tangible programs. The weakest point is ASEAN's minimal attention to issues of equity and income distribution for the poor. So, what is ASEAN lacking? I think in the areas of society, culture and environment there is much to be addressed. ASEAN, in practice, still has no 'human face', even though it has plans.

Next, human rights. Again I would like to be fair to ASEAN. On economic and social rights, ASEAN is quite willing to be supportive. But on political or democratic rights, the position of several ASEAN members is questionable. Thailand and the Philippines should take a constructive lead in this field because we are democratic, open societies. For other countries, let you judge them by yourselves. Several countries are short on democracy, and pressure is definitely needed against Myanmar. We would like to see a dialogue develop with SLORC, no, it's now SPDC (State Peace and Development Council), the new Burmese government. But actually it is not 'the government' because the regime has stolen the power from the people. I would like to counter many countries' claims that human rights violations are internal affairs. I am of the opinion that the people and international communities are eligible to voice demands on behalf of oppressed people. This action is not regarded as an intervention in internal affairs; on the contrary, it is the authority of other nations to act on behalf of those suffering. This theory or principle is universal

but not adequately respected by ASEAN, especially in the light of what is happening within some member nations.

Despite these criticisms, there has been some improvement in human rights. The Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia now all have Human Rights Commissions, but several others still need further development. If your question is: What about flaws in ASEAN's human rights image? I have a 12-point checklist for the whole of the next century because these cannot be achieved by the year 2020.

1. *Administrative detention of suspects* Thailand's record on this matter has not been good enough. Our *Anti-Communist Act* allows detention of up to 480 days, whereas the new constitution limits it to only 48 hours - not to mention the laws of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

2. *Rights are restricted by state security laws and policies* Some of these laws are in fact the legacy of British colonialism and have been enforced since the post-colonial era to suppress others.

3. *Restriction on freedom of expression* In some ASEAN countries we are not allowed to talk freely as we are doing now.

4. *Restriction on the rights to form groups.* Even in Thailand during the latest military regime, state enterprise workers were not allowed to set up labor unions, but now the matter is under review. Other ASEAN countries also have this problem.

5. *ASEAN supports the rights pertinent to development but only in one aspect,* ie socio-economic development. There is a missing element here - political development.

6. *ASEAN is against trade sanctions to counter human rights violations* The pros and cons should be debated, but ASEAN currently does not discuss the issue at all. The EU has now adopted this policy and begun revoking certain privileges for Myanmar.

7. *Some ASEAN countries dislike NGOs but favor GONGOs,* or the government's NGOs; so there are many GONGOs while NGOs lack development.

8. *Physical punishment is still a normal practice in several ASEAN countries* For instance, child beating is carried out openly and confidently by citizens who believe they have the legitimate rights to do so. This is different from many other nations in other regions.

9. *Capital punishment remains in several ASEAN countries,* but many other nations no longer accept it. It depends on your view, but I would like to inform you that it is against the views of the international community.

10. *Some customs and religious practices are against universal principles of human rights,* not to mention the restrictions on women's rights in several countries.

11. *ASEAN likes the principle of duty but dislikes the principle of rights.* In school, we are taught to perform this or that duty, but little is taught about rights.

12. *ASEAN tends to emphasize collectivism, rather than individualism.* Individual rights should not be forgotten.

Looking into the next decade or century, we have to see what ASEAN is lacking in its development within the framework of globalization. Many relevant elements are as follows.

1. One immediate issue is information technology and communication. Is there any ASEAN cooperation? Yes, there is more cooperation.

2. Ease in the movement of goods. There is more cooperation, for example AFTA.

3. Has there been any increase in cooperation within the service sector? ASEAN is working on banking and insurance.

4. What about free movement of persons to be safely employed? The answer is 'no', ASEAN has no clear policy, whereas Europe has developed a policy on the free movement of workers.

5. Has there been any increase in the free movement of capital? A little bit, but the current problem has intensified beyond that.

6. Is there any cooperation on social and environmental issues? There is a little bit but joint initiatives or projects are rare.

On the other hand, when talking about what is going on under the counter, how much we can resist such illicit forces?

1. Illegal communications via information technology, such as pornography. ASEAN's resistance is too little and too late.

2. Illegal goods such as drugs, there is some resistance but not enough.

3. Illicit service, resistance is still inadequate. Children continue to be victims of prostitution and human trafficking.

4. Illegal movement of humans such as illegal migration, ASEAN's resistance is not sufficient, lacking in both policy and projects. Also, it has not adequately dealt with such issues as money from the black or under-the-counter economy and the link between political corruption and environmental destruction.

Lastly, I would like to raise an observation of *ASEAN Vision 2020*. I think it represents only a vision but no mission; so how are we to achieve it? Where are the projects? The Vision comprises four parts as follows.

1. *A Concert of Southeast Asian Nations* Southeast Asian countries to join forces for peace and justice. This part is quite good.

2. *A Partnership in Dynamic Development* To forge closer economic integration through AFTA or AIA, for example. But there is no mention of free, legal movement of persons or policy on containing activities in the dark or under-the-counter economy.

3. *A Community of Caring Societies* I think this might be too broad. Though we have "...open ASEAN societies consistent with their respective national identities", I think it should be qualified by adding "in democratic communities". Without this phrase, regimes like the SPDC can construe the meaning to fit their own purposes.

4. *ASEAN must also be caring for societies outside ASEAN* It is a good point, I agree, but it lacks mission or action plans, including those that are beneficial to children and women, and address income distribution, prevention of power abuse by those in power, corruption, environmental degradation and people's participation. More importantly, there is no mention of democracy in the Vision.

From the status of the economic tiger we formerly aspired to attain, we have now become a small tiger, or to be even quainter, a Siamese cat. But ASEAN should proceed into the next decade with caution to avoid being a dinosaur.

Finally, I would like to suggest a new meaning of ASEAN.

A and

S should stand for "the association of sense", a sense of care for people and underprivileged groups.

E is Empathy, sympathy and understanding in politics and democracy.

A is Altruism, kindness and generosity. The 'haves' enabling the 'have-nots' to have more.

N is Norms, criteria consistent with universal principles, not vice versa.

If ASEAN could become like this, it would be a dinosaur - but like those in Jurassic Park, it would be reborn!



Dr Surachai Sirikrai,

Dr Surachai Sirikrai, Acting Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs, Thammasat University

I agree with Dr Vitit on several points, absolutely on the notion that ASEAN's past efforts on social development were a complete failure. I also think that it has not succeeded in the economic field either. But it has accomplished the main objective - security.

On what Minister Surin has said, I would like to add that in 1967 when ASEAN came into existence, communist threats were prevalent. The US became engaged in the Vietnam War and set up military bases in Thailand. Vietnam was heavily bombed. Many people expected that once Thailand allowed the presence of American troops on its soil, North Vietnam would be crushed, like the final scenario in the Korean War. But despite its biggest military operation since World War II, involving half a million troops and three years of bombing from 1964 to 1966, the US was defeated. Consequently, the morale of US allies plunged deeply, especially for Thailand - the strongest anti-communist nation in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, the world's third biggest communist party was ready to stage a revolution. But they were crushed by Suharto who later rose to power. Malaysia also experienced a crisis of morale when the British Labour Party announced in 1965 that all naval forces would by 1970 be recalled from the Far East and posted behind the frontline of the Suez Canal. Malaysia and Singapore became aware that they could no longer rely on the Commonwealth. As the British said, "Our Empire is finished".

These were the external factors which brought ASEAN into existence. I would like to add that ASEAN was set up because a number of free but non-democratic countries feared communism. They had learned that reliance on the superpowers was not an effective self-defence. And the most likely alternative was to build regional cooperation. The US, the UK and France could come and go at any time while the countries in this region had to be here. So security was the underlying premise of ASEAN.

But a point made by Dr Vitit is also correct. Going through the seven-point Bangkok Declaration, you will not see any mention of political or military intent. This was a deliberate omission, I suppose. If this organization were established for a military purpose, it would invite retaliation from North Vietnam. We knew that Vietnam was eager to set up the Indochina Federation and we refrained from such provocation. So we said the primary purpose of ASEAN was economic, social, technical and cultural cooperation, and an adherence to the UN Charter. It was an ordinary association of countries in the same region, and nothing else. If we openly formed a military alliance, North Vietnam would be provoked and provided with a pretext to go ahead with its plan. This was the wisdom of ASEAN leaders.

Reliance on the superpowers was not secure. They could produce many reasons when they did not want to help us. Sometimes they claimed their governments would like to help us but the congresses disagreed. Small countries, like Thailand, had no power to deal with the "sly" superpowers. This was the real motive behind the creation of ASEAN whose primary concern was security - for self-defence and to fight against communism.

Over the past 30 years, activities were focussed on security. As Dr Vitit said, ASEAN lacked development in the areas of democracy and human rights, or even economy. In an impolite way, I would like to say that ASEAN leaders were a 'gang of dictators'. All these countries were under some form of authoritarianism. Even now, Indonesia is still a dictatorship with illegitimate

control over East Timor. But ASEAN members could not utter a word of blame because we all belong to the same breed. When soldiers staged a coup or killed students in Thailand, our ASEAN friends stayed silent, because these 'internal' events were none of their business.

Suharto came to power in 1965, and after more than 30 years he remains entrenched.³ Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore has been in power for more than 30 years, Mahathir of Malaysia for 16 years, Marcos of the Philippines lasted for 20-plus years. Thailand has been under several military regimes. ASEAN has many such leaders. So if you hope for democracy and human rights from these figures, I think you are dreaming. In my view, the foreign policies of ASEAN countries are exactly what classic textbooks say, "Foreign policy is an extension of domestic politics". In this regard, no other cases are as 'perfect' as that of the ASEAN member nations.

In the past, ASEAN policy never touched on these matters because we had these types of leaders. In Thailand, we had numerous problems concerning human rights, women's and children's rights. Why did ASEAN Leaders have to pay attention to what was going on in Myanmar, Cambodia and East Timor? These issues were not on these leaders' minds. They focused on security, integrity and sovereignty of their nations, and not East Timor. They had a 'sacred' phrase, "non-intervention in internal affairs". This mentality, however, helped to keep ASEAN united. If they opted to follow international principles or democracy, I think, ASEAN would have collapsed in its first year.

There were many conflicts within ASEAN during the first three years. The birth of Malaysia angered Indonesia, seeing it as an imperialist ploy. Singapore, then under Malaysia's umbrella, was not happy because its hefty revenues were siphoned to support development in other Malay states. Even after Singapore became independent, conflicts with Malaysia continued on currency-pegging problems.

In 1968 Singapore and Indonesia severed their diplomatic ties. Confrontation erupted after Singapore arrested and immediately executed two Indonesian marines on espionage charges. It was said that Indonesia was so furious that it planned to attack Singapore. Our then Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman had to step in for reconciliation, citing reasons that Communist China and North Vietnam would be laughing if ASEAN fell apart in just two years due to quarrels among its members. From the perspective of other nations and Western academics, the future of ASEAN was really in doubt. ASEAN was not the first of its kind in this region, which earlier bred the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA)⁴ and MAPHILINDO⁵ for example, which all ended up in failure. And ASEAN might not have been an exception, in view of its vast diversity and difference.

3 Suharto finally resigned from the position of President in May 1998, in the wake of violent demonstrations and riots in the streets of Jakarta and other centers across the Indonesian archipelago.

4 ASA (Association of Southeast Asia) was a regional organisation established on July 31, 1961, made up of the Federation of Malaya, the Philippines and Thailand. Its objectives are to strengthen stability and security and to act as an international political forum as well. Then, there came the ASEAN concept which embraces ASA members and other nations in the region. Once the ASEAN endeavour was widely recognised, ASA automatically came to an end.

5 MAPHILINDO was founded on August 5, 1963, initiated by the Philippines, with an aim to reconcile conflicts among ethnic-Malay states namely the Federation of Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia. Anti-imperialism and

Indonesia, the most populous and poorest country, was under Dutch rule for nearly 400 years. The nation was imbued with an anti-Western attitude because Westerners, then knowing nothing about democracy and human rights, had never helped the Indonesians but rather advocated the brutality of Dutch rule. Only in recent times, following the end of the cold war, has the west become “enlightened” and begun to view human rights as important. Because of this, Indonesia has long hated the West.

The Philippines was supported a special case. It was under Spanish rule for 327 years. When Spain was defeated by the US, it became a US colony for another 58 years. Due to long and different periods of colonial rule, Filipinos experienced an identity crisis. They were outwardly Asian, but they were also Catholic whose interests ranged from enjoying Spanish dances to talking about US-style democracy. Malaysia was rather well-behaved under British rule for a considerable period. Thailand was never politically colonized; but under British-imposed economic conditions, it could be dubbed as a semi-colonial economy.

Due to the varied and many differences among members, other countries guessed that ASEAN could not live longer than five years. But now ASEAN is 30 years old and still going strong. It has become a model for heterogeneous regionalism, whereas the EU represents homogeneous regionalism. Everyone has predicted that the EU will be a success and I think so too. They are Caucasians, sharing the same Hellenistic culture and adjoining borders. They revived their post-war economies under the Marshall Plan. They jointly formed NATO to deal with Soviet threats. These nations also have advanced technology. So they are not likely to fail.

ASEAN nations, however, have nothing in common. Fears of communism were the only compelling factor in their banding together. Capitalists were afraid that they might be rounded up and hanged by the communists or peasants. With such a background, ASEAN, thus far, has been largely interested in security. And we can say, it has been successful to a certain extent. ASEAN spent the first 12 years settling disputes among its members. Without ASEAN, regional battles would have occurred. ASEAN facilitated problem-solving talks among members and allowed third party involvement. For instance, Thailand once acted as an intermediary in resolving disputes over Sabah territory. A third party role was not regarded as an act of interference, but rather a conversation among members. The policy of non-intervention in others' internal affairs made separatism in the region less severe. All members, we should note, had ethnic minorities and communist problems that were sensitive to outside intervention and separatism.

Besides their success in safeguarding regional security and territorial integrity, ASEAN countries joined forces to create the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) and AFTA. ASEAN is fully aware that sticking together will increase bargaining power. It also gained recognition on the international stage thanks to its success in resolving the Cambodian conflicts. This was the

economic cooperation were also part of their intent outlined in the Manila Declaration. The group was later beset by disputes, such as the Philippines in 1963 refused to recognise the Federation of Malaysia and diplomatic ties were severed as a result.

first time ASEAN nations had solved a regional dispute on their own. The superpowers just took a back seat and gave moral support but did not play any direct role. Thailand, regarded as a frontline state, was one of the key actors in this endeavour. Owing to such success, ASEAN has become a study model for others. South Asian nations, for example, view ASEAN as a model for heterogeneous grouping.

The non-intervention tradition, however, also led us to ignore human rights in our neighboring countries, particularly in the cases of SLORC and East Timor. We never discussed these issues because we were committed to non-intervention. This can be regarded as a weak point and a current problem within ASEAN.

ASEAN has been considerably or even highly successful in the areas of politics and security. But on the economic front, I think ASEAN has made little progress. Bella Balassa's 'Theory on Regionalism' is my measuring standard. The formation of economic groups, take the EU as an example, comprises five stages: 1) Free Trade Area; 2) Customs Union; 3) Common Market; 4) Single Market; and, 5) Federation of States which the EU is presently approaching. If successful, the EU will be a single entity built on peaceful integration of countries through an economic approach. If compared to the EU, has ASEAN just arrived at the first stage, ie AFTA⁶. Obviously, economic cooperation during the first 25 years was of minor significance. Initiated by former Thai Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, economic integration (AFTA) began in 1992 at the Fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore.

Therefore when measured against this standard, ASEAN's economic endeavors are a failure. But on considering the region's low levels of economic development and many obstacles, some people are not so cynical. Firstly, ASEAN members are agricultural-based economies, selling similar raw materials. Take Thailand and the Philippines for example. Both produce the same kinds of products, hence a low volume of bilateral trade. Over time, intra-regional trade has been minimal and this is a problem in itself. Yet more importantly, ASEAN leaders also lacked vision and focused only on self-interests. Indonesia has all along resisted an attempt for economic integration. Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines proposed 20 years ago that a free trade zone be set up. But Indonesia repeatedly said, "This is a good idea, but not now". Because of its large population, huge domestic market and low level of industrial development, Indonesia would go broke if it accepted a free trade concept.

We managed to set up AFTA in 1992 simply because it was the last chance to do so. The EU announced its *Single Market Plan* and the US declared the birth of NAFTA, so where was the space for ASEAN? In 1992 everyone talked about setting up regional economic zones and protectionism gained much momentum. These outside forces drove ASEAN leaders to admit that this was the last train to catch for future survival.

⁶ The decision to establish AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Area) came out of the 1992 Fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore. It is an approach to strengthen trade cooperation, attract investment into ASEAN and broaden the common market. Effective from January 1, 1993, implementation will be completed within 15 years. The primary objective is to enhance ASEAN's position as a competitive production base to serve the global market. Based on the Framework Agreement on Enhancing ASEAN Economic Cooperation, AFTA's main mechanism is the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) Scheme, under which tariffs will be reduced and non-tariff barriers removed within specific time frames.

We can see that any decision requiring great vision needs the compelling force of an external crisis. ASEAN leaders lacked great vision and often came up with short-sighted decisions. After their lengthy stay in power, authoritarianism and cronyism flourished while democracy vanished. In Singapore, for instance, any university lecturer daring to criticize the government would be fired. But many Thai politicians still hailed Singapore as a democratic model, so this reflected their wisdom as well.

In my view, ASEAN still has a long way to go in the area of economic cooperation. I am of the opinion that a 'managed economy' was the key factor in the economic success of ASEAN nations namely Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore as well as the NICs like South Korea and Taiwan. Governments of these countries worked closely with and gave all-out support to the private sector to expedite development of certain industries. During the Korean War Thailand sent troops to help South Korea; but 30 years later Thailand which had never experienced any big war became a market for exported cars from South Korea. Formerly Thailand was a destination for South Korean educational trips, but presently the opposite scenario is true. Taiwan, a small island with some 20 million people, currently hold one-third of the world PCs (personal computers) market. But Thailand sells only parts and components from productions lines supported by the Japanese and Americans investment. Thais have only labor for sale, no know-how or any research and development (R & D) of our own. Export goods produced by Thai-owned factories are rare. 'Pheasant' bicycles seem to be the only product in this regard. I once hoped that 'Thanin' radios would earn a reputation for Thailand, but they eventually went under.

South Korea's industrial development has made rapid progress thanks to the state support underpinning its industrial policy. Now I am concerned about the IMF's role in bailing out the Thai, Indonesian and South Korean economies. The IMF has demanded, among other things, an open society and an open market - trade liberalization with no government support, subsidy or assistance under industrial policy. All these demands are what the US has tried in vain to negotiate with APEC countries. An American leader said that if there were no IMF-imposed conditions, it might take the US at least 15 years to talk these nations into opening their markets. So I am wondering and worrying about the future of industrial development in South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia.

Our strategy of a 'managed economy' will not be allowed to continue. This is the main reason why Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia refrained from accepting the IMF's bail-out package, but borrowed money from Singapore and Brunei instead. Malaysia did not want to be under IMF conditions which run contrary to its industrial development policy. But Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea have already accepted the IMF's programs, so their economic development must be in line with the free-market concept. The question is whether we can compete with developed economies like the US, Europe and Japan, or do we have to grow rice forever; or at best produce canned rice for export? Do we have any chance to be engaged in advanced industry, or having our own information technology?

Another question is: Where will ASEAN be in the capitalist world context of division-of-labor in the next 20 years? With our economic development approach now under the IMF's control there will be profound change. Take the Philippines for example. After 34 years under the IMF, large companies came under foreign ownership since the Filipinos had no capital. When the American Insurance Association (AIA) entered the Thai market, many Thai-owned insurance companies collapsed and AIA grew in leaps and bounds. Under Article 8 of the IMF scheme, we are required to liberalize the service sector, especially financial businesses. You know, in the financial world nobody is better or has more money than the Americans. So we should stop dreaming of a future for this sector. We will be severely battered. How many of the 15 Thai banks will be taken over?

I have no idea of what has been discussed at the ASEAN meeting on vision for the next 20 years and where the niche for ASEAN lies in the capitalist world's division-of-labor platform. I think our dream to become a NIC has to be revamped. This is a matter of concern.

Minister Surin suggested that we should be a leader in moral affairs and the development of universal ideology, but I am rather pessimistic. The proposed concept of open societies was opposed by means of reinterpretation, resulting in nothing new. If you talk about an open society in your own cultural and social framework, it will be the same old thing.

In the future, if we would like ASEAN to have a human face, I think this must begin with the people. People's power, like that which used to prevail in the Philippines or Thailand, now has disappeared; we have to campaign for the revival of this power. Foreign policy has never been an issue in election campaigns in ASEAN countries. That is normal since the average person is usually not interested in foreign policy. In developed countries - America and Europe - only 10 per cent of people are interested in foreign policy. In a less developed country like Thailand, it would be fine if we have 0.001 percent. As long as the people of ASEAN lack awareness and do not fight for democracy, human rights, women's rights and children's rights, we will not witness any substantial progress. On the contrary, the situation may get worse after we have admitted lesser developed countries into ASEAN. They might slow the process of ASEAN's ideological development. Personally I am against the rapid expansion of ASEAN membership but there might have been reasons concerning security and bargaining power. I think development towards the ASEAN ideology will emerge only when people in each country exercise their power. We have to expel authoritarian leaders from power so that ASEAN policy can be changed.

We can see that ASEAN has all along been a 'top-down' organization because it was initiated by leaders on the grounds of security. People at the grass roots have no conception of its role. Though one of the seven points in the Bangkok Declaration aims to promote Southeast Asian Studies, in practice this has been a total failure. I think the Education Ministry in each ASEAN state needs to

incorporate Asian Studies or Southeast Asian Studies into its national curriculum. If we want people-to-people cooperation to be expanded further, we have to revamp our education systems. Most Thai students, I suppose, know more about the US than about Laos, Myanmar or others in this region. This is a big issue we need to address.

Mr Kavi Chongkittavorn, Editor of *The Nation*

The problem of being the last speaker is that there is only two per cent content left to talk about since the others have gone through the other 98 per cent already. But what I am going to discuss in the remaining two per cent may change your perception from earlier listening. I think there are three reasons why ASEAN did not fall apart.

First, all ASEAN leaders like to play golf. They can solve all problems on the negotiating table at the golf course. Second, after a round of golf, if the problems remain unsolved, there is still *karaoke* relished by all ASEAN leaders and senior officials, with *Yesterday* being their favorite song. Third, after singing, if the problems still exist, especially when Malaysia or Thailand are playing host, the durian is eaten in the next session. This is the special recipe for a healthy ASEAN.

I would like to look at ASEAN from a different perspective. Minister Surin has, figuratively, driven us in an air-conditioned sedan along the expressway; so we saw a very nice ASEAN. But I will look at ASEAN from the view of a non-air-conditioned bus commuter. And my version of ASEAN will also be different from Dr Vitit's, which looks very serious and distant, like 'ASEAN on paradise'.

In my opinion, ASEAN is an organization with several purposes. Firstly, ASEAN is successful because it has never washed its dirty clothes in public. ASEAN keeps all its problems under the table and refrains from discussing any problem outside. Therefore, ASEAN documents reveal no secrets because any secrets will never be recorded. In the ASEAN library, there are no secret memos. This is their secret of success - ASEAN never washes its dirty clothes in public.

Secondly, ASEAN is successful because everybody has benefited from it. You have to pay an annual membership fee of 700,000 US dollars. In admitting a new member, discussions did not center on a country's tyrannical regime, but on its ability to pay the fee on schedule. That's what they talked about, really. Every member has benefited from ASEAN because it had a sense of purpose. Singapore and Brunei joined ASEAN for protection against Indonesian bullying. Indonesia was a 'delinquent' of the region, so it needed friends or institutions to protect its behavior. ASEAN was formed because other nations wanted to control Indonesia's behavior in foreign affairs. Minister Surin did not go into the detail of events prior to the signing of the Bangkok Declaration, of which Singapore was the last to apply for membership. Sri Lanka and Burma were also approached, but Burma refused to join the association because of its non-alignment policy.

Thirdly, ASEAN is successful because it has bargaining power. Members know that standing alone means death but working together will optimize their bargaining power. And Vietnam was the first to experience and suffer adversity delivered by the unity of ASEAN. This could explain why Vietnam gave priority to joining ASEAN. Its move to be a member was so fast that ASEAN was nearly caught by surprise.

Next, ASEAN is very good at fund-raising. It has never paid out of its own pocket. ASEAN was born to solicit money from rich countries. ASEAN's new member admission is different from the EU's. A would-be EU member has to follow certain programs for political and economic adjustment, but ASEAN has no such requirements. The first question asked by Vietnam, upon joining ASEAN, was the value of grants it would receive in the following year. Myanmar, after becoming a member, became very angry when it could not join the ASEAN-Europe agreements. It expected to secure financial aid through the ASEAN window after paying a hefty 700,000-dollar fee, but failed because of human rights violations. Lastly, ASEAN was born in an era of sluggish trade. Though its political agenda was clear, it also wanted to open the European and Japanese markets. And this remains a wish of ASEAN today.

The number of failures ASEAN has recorded is not high but all cases are major. The most significant is that ASEAN is an association of those living in the ivory tower. It has failed to provide the man in the street with an understanding of what ASEAN is. For Bangkokians, *Asean* is a department store in Phrakhanong district; for Indonesians, a tailor's shop; for Filipinos, a massage parlor. As ASEAN has no real meaning for ordinary people, it really is an association of people living in the ivory tower. They have to speak ASEAN jargon, recognize ASEAN values and attend ASEAN meetings. From last year up till now, a total of 246 meetings have taken place, that is one meeting every 36 hours. So it is hard to imagine a fight breaking out among ASEAN officials who meet and sing karaoke together every 36 hours. They know and understand one another so well. The often-mentioned success of ASEAN is that there has never been battles or wars among its members. But it has also never given people a feeling of participation, either, because ASEAN is the responsibility of leaders who mostly advocate tyrannical regimes.

We hardly know about ASEAN-ness. We have no passport, currency or common time of ASEAN. Attempts to set ASEAN common time over the past two years have failed because Singapore insisted that trade was the priority. The ASEAN song was another flop since they could not agree on the occasion and procedure for playing this song.

Another problem in its 30-year history is the rapid and excessive expansion of ASEAN, especially the admission of the last three members: Vietnam in 1995, and Laos and Myanmar in 1997. Their political and economic systems differ from the core members. This may present problems in the future and some seem to have already appeared. For instance, Thai travelers with no visas will be arrested in Vietnam, whereas diplomats and investors will be granted visas.

Formerly, ASEAN nationals did not require visas to travel anywhere within ASEAN. So the question is: If Cambodia becomes a member, will it grant visas to the Vietnamese?

Regarding the flexible consensus mentioned by the Minister, the concept was in fact borrowed from APEC, and not initiated by ASEAN. On policy matters, consensus remains the fundamental principle of ASEAN. If there is any disagreement, the subject in question will not be endorsed as a policy. An exception is the policy on industrial or commercial cooperation, which includes the formula called 'Minus X' to accommodate members unprepared for certain implementations. Later, as more members were admitted, this formula was also applied to security issues.

The last gathering was called an informal summit but many people do not understand the difference between the formal and the informal. An informal one does not require minute-taking or recording of the meeting. Its advantage is that if you are ready, you do it; if you are not ready, you need not do it; and then if you still are not ready again, you might cite an error of hearing as an excuse. So ASEAN leaders generally prefer an informal meeting because of 'better' atmosphere and the lack of records for official reference.

During the first 25 years, ASEAN met only three times. The leaders believed that the number of meetings indicated the volume of problems. So if they met annually, how could they find a success story to tell their peoples? At the last meeting, I believe the proposal concerning open societies was a success for Thailand and its government. Without backing from a brave government, the Foreign Ministry would not have fought tooth and nail. I have to note that this Administration was the prime mover behind the subject of open societies. That's why our senior officials did not give up their efforts when Indonesia dismissed the wording and suggested 'progressive societies' instead. Vietnam also agreed with Indonesia. This great move came at a time when our Thai society has just enacted a new constitution. Many people are not aware that Thailand's stance on foreign affairs is very important. I do not think that Thailand's role at the recent APEC and ASEAN meetings would have been so successful had Thailand been represented by our last prime minister. Premier Chuan was able to convince APEC and ASEAN leaders because they believed in the leadership's integrity - a quality Thailand has never had before. So this time we could push it through. The Foreign Ministry, in my opinion, has creative ideas and systematic efforts. Now that Thai politics has become different, more transparent, and that we are now an open society, I think Thailand can play the lead.

If Thailand can weather the current economic crisis over the next three to four years it will be an exemplary society with a higher degree of openness and transparency than found in any other country of the East Asia. The last ASEAN meeting was also significant in that China, Japan and South Korea were present. It was the first time since World War II, that Asian countries put their heads together and decided on their future, without the presence of non-Asian participants. This is, I suppose, the first step towards a free trade zone that extends beyond ASEAN and includes China, Japan and South Korea as well.

The word 'regionalism' will come to cover all of East Asia - 'East Asia regionalism'. We have to be 'open' to accommodate more members. ASEAN's name may have to be changed to the Association of Asian Nations, with its membership extended to include other Asian countries. Towards this trend, there have been some actions like amending the protocol of the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia* to enable countries outside the ASEAN region to accede to the Treaty.

The cooperation between ASEAN and Northeast Asia - China, Japan and South Korea - will be enhanced, in both economic and security areas. Especially regards security, it will be the first time Asians look at it with their own eyes. It is true that the US is still the main pillar supporting Asian security which in turn gives rise to economic growth. But this will change, as China now has become a real superpower in this region. At the last meeting, Japan appeared to be the second superpower since it was unable to set the framework of economic and security cooperation with ASEAN in the future. China did not contribute money to ASEAN, but ASEAN seemed to be very close to China - closer than to Japan, which over time has granted much financial assistance to ASEAN.

All in all, in the future, ASEAN will be a more united organization with more members, including not only poor nations but also those with economic power and security strength. In the past, the only issue relevant to joining ASEAN membership was import-tariff reductions; whereas the EU's requirements range from import tariff to such matters as democracy and human rights. In the future, I suppose, ASEAN will be more holistic - that is, it will take into consideration all dimensions be they political, economic, security, cultural or social. The ideal as outlined by Dr Vitit will be part of the ASEAN agenda in the next 10 to 20 years. That's what ASEAN will look like and how it will survive in the future.

Suggested Reading

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