

Keynote Address
by Mr. Anand Panyarachun
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on “International Cooperation
Among Higher Education Institutions”
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Distinguished Participants, Ladies & Gentlemen:

I am honoured to be with you at this Golden Jubilee Convention marking Kasetsart University's 50 years of excellence in serving our country and bringing together such an impressive group of international and domestic educators.

In my term as Prime Minister, I would like to think that I played a role in stressing the emphasis that must be placed on education, which should be high on the agenda of all future governments. I am reminded of a talk I gave last August to the Foreign Chambers of Commerce, where I stated:

“A better educated population will be the key to our nation's efforts to tackle the challenges of the future. Higher levels of education will lead to greater political awareness, reduce differences in economic opportunities between urban and rural areas, and the enhanced competitiveness of the Thai economy.”

As a private citizen, I continue to believe strongly in that statement. Education is the key upon which the development of the Thai society rests, and, indeed, the development of the entire Southeast Asian region.

In my talk today, I shall first present my views on the changing role of education in the world economy. Then, closer to home, I shall put forward some thoughts on the crucial role of education in the regional context – both for ASEAN and for the emerging nations of Indochina, Myanmar, and southern China. Lastly, I shall conclude with some ideas on the challenges to be considered and addressed by this prestigious international convention.

1. Role of Education in a Changing Global Economy

To play a vital role in shaping society, education must continuously respond to the changes taking place around us.

There have been many in recent years:

- The end of the cold war has altered the types of problems mankind is dealing with to include more economic and social issues;
- Improved information and transportation flows have increased the amount of ideas and goods available to answer these new questions; and
- The increasing integration of the world economy has given us more choices and options, increasing the complexity of the environment in which these questions are both posed and answered. Actions we take increasingly “spill over” to affect other countries or sectors.

All these developments have radically changed the way we look at the world, and education must equip us with new tools with which to approach this increasingly challenging environment.

Of course, the traditional role that education has played in helping our country develop must not be overlooked.

Successful economic development rests on the development of each person to his fullest intellectual and moral ability. A tall order, but one I am sure you are capable of filling.

Promoting development means promoting responsibility. This is the more traditional, and time-tested, role of education in development. Education plays a crucial role in creating not only personal, but **social maturity**.

One example of this increased consciousness is the ability to gain a better understanding of politics and democracy and of events beyond one’s village or town of birth. This will be accompanied by increasing political development and a strengthening of society’s institutions to achieve true social maturity.

Another example of increased consciousness is looking at how industrialization and the economic development process can be truly useful and productive for all members of our society. With such an awareness, we will be able to address income and regional disparities that often occur along with economic development, and which can prevent the benefits of development from reaching those who need it most.

True education not only creates awareness of technological possibilities, but develops a moral consciousness to control the development of these possibilities.

We should never forget to pay attention to developing people into socially responsible citizens with the same intensity we give to developing new technologies. This moral component of education is one of the foundations of the Thai nation and a most valuable asset of traditional methods of education that we must preserve as we expand our horizons to meet the new challenges of today’s changing world.

Building upon this solid base, education must now evolve to meet these new challenges.

Expanded information and technology flows require that we prepare our people to be a part of the **information age**; expanded training in computers and communications technology are necessary for such countries as Thailand to maintain the economic progress it has experienced in recent years.

I am sure you are also well aware that the main client for university graduates has substantially shifted from the civil service to the private sector. This means that more effective inter-facing between universities and the private sector is essential and we must develop innovative programs to ensure this is achieved. Industry/academic cooperation can ensure that research is quickly applied to serve the general public.

Another new challenge we must meet is the ability to support **sustainable development**. Environmental awareness, energy efficiency, and conservation technology must all be addressed to stop the depletion of our natural resources. Our development must be built upon sustainability of these resources, or we will end up paying more later for their rehabilitation. People are but one of our available resources, and education should teach us that improvement of our own condition is dependent on the improvement of our environment.

Environmental cooperation is one example of how countries can cooperate to pool talented manpower to address common global problems. As the world gets smaller, we must educate people to understand their neighbors and their neighbor's concerns, to be more tolerant. Cultural understanding and a global perspective come through awareness of other societies, and universities must increase this awareness. Only by achieving such an understanding can Thailand truly function in today's global economy and participate in the fight to solve our global problems.

At the same time, social responsibility can be promoted by increasing awareness of those less privileged within our society. Universities must continue efforts to extend themselves to the community to ensure that new ideas reach all levels of the population.

Kasetsart began pioneering such an outreach approach some 40 years ago, offering short courses during holidays, off-hours, and weekends to small entrepreneurs, farmers, and to mothers at home. Such efforts should be expanded to ensure that those who cannot attend university full-time can still profit from our centers of higher learning.

The evolution of education is fundamental to our societal development. While traditional roles must always remain, evolve, and be improved, efforts to implement the newer roles education is being called upon to fill must be given top priority.

2. Education and Regional Development

In Southeast Asia, and the areas around Thailand in particular, there exists significant scope for education to play a key role in promoting economic development in the emerging nations of Indochina, Myanmar, and southern China. Thailand's recent economic prosperity has caused us to transform our role in some cases to that of a donor, instead of a recipient, country.

A recent study of the Asian Development Bank on regional cooperation in the education sphere concluded that there is a strong link between "education and training on the one hand, and productivity and income on the others."

At a most basic level, education, especially of women, has a crucial effect on poverty, health and nutrition, and can drastically improve basic standards of living.

While improvement in primary education is seen as most likely to yield the highest returns, technical and vocational education, especially management training, is singled out by the Bank as the most important way to help alleviate serious skills shortages in parts of the region. Focused training can promote such sub-regional sectoral efforts as development of tourism and of new technologies.

Interviews with area governments showed they feel that coordinating at least some elements of higher education, especially research capabilities, on a sub-regional basis will increase the region's knowledge base and ensure that skills crucial to economic development are available from among the population of the region.

As an example of such regional research and training, I may cite Kasetsart's Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC), which is being sponsored by the Asian Development Bank, along with Swiss and Thai agencies. This community forestry training program utilizes knowledge from several different countries by employing resource persons "on-loan" from various public and private groups. The global community helps preserve a dwindling global resource – the forests – through a cooperative university program. Further collaboration of this kind between countries will help reach the goals on our global and regional **agenda**, of which resource preservation ranks high on the list. Universities are the natural catalyst for sharing the knowledge needed to reach these goals.

At another level, there still exists considerable scope for enhanced cooperation between the ASEAN nations in the human resource development arena.

Development of additional **area-oriented** specialized regional research/education centers, such as SEARCA in the Philippines, BIOTROP in Indonesia, and AIT in Thailand should be promoted. Cooperating universities can channel themselves into technology generation and transfer as an inter-disciplinary project.

Encouraging the academic and private sector to work together, while at the same time encouraging academic cooperation, is especially important in newly

emerging areas of technology. Development and successful transfer of these technologies is key to strengthening regional economic competitiveness and improving the welfare of each of the ASEAN national economies.

An increased number of regional cooperative science parks and research centers can be facilitated by seeking multilateral and bilateral funding to support these initiatives. Such an area-oriented view for university research agendas greatly assists regional economic development by expanding our existing body of knowledge while simultaneously integrating that knowledge with the regional economy.

In these ways, better regional cooperation can be supported through better academic cooperation.

3. The Challenges Posed for this International Convention

Although I am far from being an educational expert, I shall take the liberty of concluding with four main challenges that I urge the educationalists present here to address during this ambitious Inter-national convention.

First, to promote the internationalization of education by forging more international linkages between educational institutions. Teacher exchanges, student exchanges, and international cooperation on study and training at both graduate and undergraduate levels are all ways to further internationalize education. To this can be added specific networking opportunities between academics in different countries through information exchange and research.

Second, to encourage educational institutions to continuously develop their curricula and course offerings in response to evolving economic, political, and social conditions and to improve linkages between the education sector and other sectors in the economy. All areas of knowledge must be approached by being placed within a comprehensive international context.

Third, to use education as a tool to promote **social maturity** in our nations and increase mutual trust and understanding. World leaders can make peace and war, but it takes ordinary citizens to create world understanding. Proper education can encourage social responsibility and an awareness of global perspectives and common global problems which override parochial concerns, whether personal, local, or national.

Last, to combine increased international linkages with international understanding to initiate concrete educational initiatives to assist the newly emerging nations of the region in their economic and social development. By also forging links with other ASEAN economies for mutual assistance in these areas, we can further the development of the entire region.

I am aware that these are not small challenges, and that your deliberations will not end with this convention. But I am equally sure this conference is a perfect example of the critical long-range thinking the education sector needs to face these challenges.

I look forward to observing your successes in these areas, and to the resulting continued social and economic development in the Southeast Asian region amid improved trust and understanding among our peoples.

I wish you all good luck as you tackle these critical challenges.