

## Asia-Ready Webinar Series

### **COVID-19, Geopolitics and Integration: What ASEAN Can Do**

The Asia-Ready Webinar Series is co-curated with various partners to allow youth to gain a better appreciation of the regional developments and a greater awareness of Singapore's interconnectivity with the regional markets.

Sat, 24 Oct 2020

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Online Event



### About the Webinar

#### **Speakers**

Associate Professor Simon SC Tay – Chairman of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs

#### **Synopsis**

In this exclusive webinar, Associate Professor Simon Tay, Chairman of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, will share how the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated trends towards protectionism and how Singapore's economy and the supply chains have been disrupted by the trade war between China and the US. In the face of these geopolitical trends and COVID-19, what is the relevance of ASEAN as a multilateral institution? Why

does ASEAN matter and what can ASEAN do to preserve freedom of choice and assert agency in the volatile international environment?

*This webinar was brought to you by the National Youth Council (NYC) and the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA)*

## What We've Learnt

### **ASEAN Integration**

ASEAN is valuable to us and Singapore does not exist as a sole island. Value creation for the region lies with youths and it is important to be exposed to opportunities in the market. The time is now. Even though we cannot travel, this can be done virtually.

From the poll held during the webinar, most participants (mostly Singaporean youths) felt that ASEAN countries view Singapore favourably and they also have favourable views towards ASEAN countries. This is a good view to go in with. It does not mean you have to be the same to like each other. However, there are times when Singapore can be perceived as aggressive, loud and arrogant. Because we may have done better, some of us have a haughty view in that we are better. Our region is very dynamic and rich culturally and in many different aspects, we need to remember this. It matters that other countries like us. Singapore should continue to strive to be the best partner that everyone wants to play and work with us. We have to be big-hearted so that we can lift the region up together.

ASEAN integration is key. Through the global value chain, there are manufacturing components that can go right through the whole region. For example, a computer chip or other intermediate parts can come from one country in ASEAN and assembly can be in another country in ASEAN. Supply chains are shifting today; many in the world are looking at production bases in ASEAN to manufacture their products.

### **COVID-19**

Most polled that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their lives. Surely, some things can be done virtually but others require human contact. Where work is concerned, meetings between corporates sometimes require Face-to-Face interactions for more candid and informal discussions. Others who travel to neighbouring states to work are also severely impacted. Many in Johor travel to Singapore to work daily and can no longer do so. The same goes for those who travel to work between Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar.

For the world to reopen, short of a vaccine, there needs to be emphasis placed on 'care'. We need to feel confident to open up in a way that is safe and controlled. But we cannot remain permanently closed.

### **Geopolitics**

ASEAN was formed in 1967 during a period of uncertainty, during the Cold War and the Vietnam War, to build up confidence and political stability. Although we are in a time of

peace, the intensifying rivalry between US and China will continue to challenge ASEAN unity. ASEAN will need continued dialogue and cooperation to manoeuvre through these tensions.

## Questions Answered

*By Associate Professor Simon Tay*

### **What do you think are the factors that can encourage youths to be more interested in ASEAN?**

We can inculcate a spirit of adventure and entrepreneurship within youths. Youths should recognise and cherish opportunities to learn abroad.

Factors such as knowing about the economic and job opportunities, especially those career pathways that are not possible in Singapore, as well as building cross-border friendships and networks, can contribute to our interest in the region.

### **Will ASEAN be like EU one day and will we see something like Brexit happening for ASEAN?**

ASEAN is different from Europe. With ASEAN, there is a sense of friendship aligned by common interest. In Europe, they went through a period of large student exchange programme, while this is not the case in ASEAN. But as others catch up, such interchanges might be more common. In ASEAN, more forms of exchange are already taking place or will take place in the future, e.g. football.

The EU as a political structure is really unique. It has committed a lot of resources and there has been a lot of trade-offs as well. ASEAN is different, it is integrated but the common threads are not so thick. Rules are made by what countries want. We need to be careful on how we integrate to maximise our common interests.

### **Should I be interested in politics?**

If the government can deliver growth and progress, then you can enjoy and focus on your future. Things need to be better in the region. Look for a purpose behind reading up and delving into politics. Big politics boil down to smaller politics. Even when doing business, politics might be important to take note of.