A very good evening to all fellow citizens of Thailand

First of all, let me congratulate Thailand for winning an award at this year’s “STAR AWARDS 2018.” The award was given to Thailand by Travel Bulletin. Travel agencies and companies in the United Kingdom voted Thailand as the best country in the category of “Star Cultural and Heritage Holidays Destination.” Also, Thailand was placed at number 2 for Star Online Training Course for tourism support and services.

Travel Bulletin is a world-renowned travel magazine that offers the latest information about tourism and related services. Also, the magazine provides a number of activities and training for tourism entrepreneurs. Having been around for 20 years, STAR AWARDS is one of the most trustworthy and recognizable awards in the world.

This is a positive image of Thailand through the eyes of the international community. Earlier, Thailand was voted by readers of a leading travel magazine in the United States (Condé Nast Traveller) as the “best country for people,” which I’ve already mentioned last week. During the past decade, Thailand has enjoyed a 10% increase in tourism income, thanks to the higher number of foreign visitors.

Particularly during a period of peace and stability, without political demonstrations, Thailand has seen a continuous increase in tourism revenue, from 1.14 trillion baht in 2014 to 2 trillion baht in 2017. Last year, Thailand welcomed as nearly as 36 million foreign visitors. The number puts Thailand among top ten countries visited by foreign visitors.

However, promoting domestic tourism market or “Thai Tiew Thai” is very important. We need to generate more income in local communities and create a connectivity throughout the supply-demand chain. In this regard, we have introduced second-tier tourist provinces campaign which provides tax incentives for visitors throughout 2018.

Visitors to 55 second-tier destination can use receipts of foods and accommodations to deduct income taxes of as much as 15,000 baht per person. You have 4 months left to get those deductibles. These days, in the digital era, it is convenience go on line and find out about festivals & events in each provinces.

As for tourist sites, concerned officials and entrepreneurs must provide safety and orderliness and never take advantage of visitors. They need to make sure that all security systems including surveillance cameras are in good working condition. Toilets and tourist sites must be clean to impress visitors. This way, we can make a good impression and people will want to re-visit. Let’s make a lasting impression.

My fellow Thai citizens, in relation to wealth and income circulation in local communities, apart from tourism sector which I have already mentioned, the Government aimed to boost the local economy in all provinces through the “Pracharat Market” campaign. Farmers, low-income earners, and small size businesses can conduct their businesses at Pracharat Markets.

There are 10 types of Pracharat Market and over 6,600 of them are situated across the country. These markets help add value to agricultural produces and community products. Throughout the last 8 months, more than 100,000 farmers and sellers have signed up to be part of the program.

96,000 of them (or around 91%) can sell their products through these markets, generating around 1.2 billion baht. Generally speaking, the Pracharat Market campaign generates an increase of 1,800 baht a month for each participant.

Pracharat Market is a model market. It focuses on high standards including cleanliness, safety, and foam- and plastic-free. Quality inspections are carried out periodically. At present, 37% of all markets have scored “Very High” and “High” and 19% require improvement.

Please note that our ultimate goal is to provide mechanisms that can respond to people and communities’ needs in a sustainably fashion. Chief marketing officers (CMOs) have already been appointed in all provinces. 3,000 CMOs of 25 provinces have been given training.

Moreover, the campaign underlines the importance of entrepreneurial abilities. More than 6,000 individuals have taken part in training programs at the “Entrepreneur Clinic” in their districts.

In the near future, Pracharat Market will be promoted as a tourist destination. Potential markets numbering 171 throughout 70 provinces will be selected and included in the “Sustainable Thai Tourism Calendar.”

These markets will also be a venue for distributing seasonal local produces and community products to help farmers who are facing oversupply situation. The campaign will be augmented to potential government agencies. Potential government agencies will be providing platforms for farmers to sell their goods at 475 markets nationwide.

In the next phase of the Pracharat Market initiative, the Ministry of Interior will work with local markets to turn their venues into “central markets for farm products,” giving local producers an access to the Pracharat Market campaign.

Agriculturalists will be welcomed to sell their goods at participating markets. Pracharat markets with high performances in each province will be selected as model markets. This way, success can be learnt and pass on to others for sustainable growth.

Market is likened to Thai people’s way of life. Almost every activity takes place in a market such as eating, trading, selling, and buying. If the government supports such a way of life, sustainability will transpire and economic circulation will occur, which will be followed by jobs and income for local people who will no longer rely on ‘grey businesses’. This way, people can work decently and help build our nation together. As for the declining prices of rubber and other crops, the government is working with related units. We need cooperation from the all sides if we were to achieve our objectives.

My respected Thai citizens, I believe we’ve all heard about economic problems that affect currencies and stock prices in many countries that are deemed “emerging markets” throughout various continents, starting with Venezuela.

These problems drove the inflation rate in Venezuela 200,000% in August and the rate is expected to topple 1,000,000% at the end of this year. Argentina was the second country to be hit. In June, Argentina saw a huge capital outflow and depreciating currency, prompting its government to raise interest rates by 60% to keep investment money in the country.

Argentina then reached out to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to borrow 50 billion US dollars. The latest country to be hit with the same problems was Turkey in August. Its currency devalued by 40% compared to early this year and inflation rose by 18% as the central bank adjusted the interest rate up 17.8%. Let’s hope they get out of this situation. We also need to be careful, not to follow the same path.

These countries are experiencing a phenomenon called “twin deficits.” On one hand, their governments are suffering fiscal deficits because they were forced to spend more than they earn. They offsetted their account by borrowing a lot of money. This led to too much economic stimulation that caused prices of domestic products to skyrocketing. The countries then faced with inflation problem.

On the other hand, these countries encounter a budget deficit which means that there is a minus in the sales of domestic products and services compared to what they have to buy from overseas, hence the budget deficit.

In general terms, twin deficits diminish fiscal stability and lower government’s ability to deal with risks, not to mention the fact that it undermines investors’ confidence, creates a huge capital outflow, and devalues their currencies.

Likened to a plague, this phenomenon raises concerns in many emerging nations fearing they would face the same economic problems. These problems often occur in countries with low foreign reserves.

They also have high foreign debts which trigger investors to look for opportunities elsewhere. These nations are Brazil, Indonesia, India, and South Africa. Their currencies took a nosedive.

Amid global economic recess, Thailand has yet to experience such a phenomenon, evidenced by the strong Thai baht and stable stock prices, thanks to its high federal reserves. Thailand learned its lessons from the 1997 financial crisis that had a domino effect on the government, the private sector, and commercial banks. Now, we have the immunity and know how to handle these problems.

In terms of foreign reserves, people can rest assured of government’s capability. As of August 2018, Thailand has as much as 200 billion US dollars in reserves, which is considered “very high” compared to the size of the Thai economy. When compared to foreign debts, our reserves are 3.5 times higher than the combined amount of short-term debts, which indicates that we have more than enough in reserves if we were to pay off those debts today.

The government has been paying off foreign debts which now stand at only 4% of the GDP as well as adjust the debt structure by borrowing more long-term loans from domestic institutions. Such a firm financial stance is the result of national stability and security, and the expansion of Thai exports which have continued to generate revenues in foreign currencies, coupled with the stability among private organizations and commercial banks and the government’s fiscal and monetary discipline, as evidenced by the country’s public debt ratio of 41% compared to the size of the economy, which is within the set framework and standing above international criteria which should always be maintained at no higher than 60% compared to the size of the economy.

These past years, Thailand’s public debts stem from investments on the country’s basic infrastructure, which is a way to create value on investment and will benefit the public and the business sector in the future, enabling the country to edge out its international competitors in the long run.

It can be said that the strength of our international standing and financial situation, including the country's economic expansion has continually improved, resulting in a strong macroeconomy. This proves that our efforts have been successful and have helped boost confidence among both domestic and international investors.

We have not seen rapid outflows of capital as has been seen in some countries that I have mentioned earlier. On the contrary, we will see that some investors have moved their capital from other emerging markets into Thailand.

I want to stress that mobilizing the country's economy requires effort in all dimensions, including the macro and micro levels which are connected. In the present, the country's macroeconomy has significantly improved, with a growth rate increasing from 0.9% in 2014 to 4.7% in the first half of this year.

We have also attained good (financial) standing among the international community as I have mentioned earlier. What is important is extending growth from the macro level to small businesses and low-income citizens. The Government has been proactive in finding ways and has initiated new measures to attain this goal continuously so that the everyone can benefits of prosperity as much as possible.

My fellow Thai citizens, it is good news that our youth have received gold medals in the 12th ASEAN Skills Competition between August 31 - September 2, with over 300 youth competitors from ASEAN-member countries and 52 Thai competitors.

Participants competed in 26 fields in six occupational groups including technology, industrial production, communications technology, fashion and creativity, transportation and logistics, construction and building technologies, including human services.

Thailand was able to win 16 gold medals, 4 silver medals, 3 bronze medals, and 13 medals for outstanding performance, totaling 36 medals. We must help (inspire) them to pursue their career in public and private sector, as we need well developed people to help develop our country.

I would like to thank concerned subcommittees and technical teams in each field and all those who were behind this success. What is most important is applying these skills to various occupations to help raise the standards of Thai industries to coincide with trends of global market in the digital age.

Should the award winners wish to continue their education, the Ministry of Labour through the Department of Skill Development will provide support and collaborate with educational institutions for scholarships to ease their burdens. However, should they wish to enter the workforce, the department will help find suitable work that coincides with their needs.

This is to encourage these people who can be considered as “white elephant” to enter the country's labor market as skill labours. This is to support the potential of human personal and expand the country’s competitiveness according to the 20-year national strategy and the Thailand 4.0 agenda.

We must make sure that we will have enough workers (in many areas) to accommodate the country's aging society in the future.

In addition to developing skill labors, the Government also places great importance on bringing innovations and inventions to the commercial sector. The recent cabinet meeting supported the issuance of legal instrument in relation to utilization of research and innovation promotion. Such instrument has long been issued in many countries known for their advanced science, technology, innovation industries such as the United States, Japan, South Korea, and India.

The United States had passed similar legislation almost 40 years ago which helped support research and development both by the government and the private sector, resulting in over 13,600 pieces of intellectual property and over 3,000 patents filed by universities per year. It has also resulted in the establishment of up to 5,000 new companies with technological transference from universities, including over 250,000 jobs created from university-driven technologies. These factors are the reasons why the United States is one of the world’s leading countries for technology.

The Government has applied this concept idea to our country's economic mobilization where many universities and research institutions have begun conducting extensive research, such as the National Research Universities, the National Science and Technology Development Agency, and other specialized research institutions.

Once this legal instrument is in place, universities and research institutions will be able to take ownership of their studies and be able to transfer technologies.

They can make agreements and issue licenses to the private sector to turn their research into products and services for the market in an effective and inconvenient matter.

The revenue from licensing will return to universities and research institutions which must then be allocated to researchers in appropriate amounts.

Once researchers receive their fair share, they will be incentivized to produce quality research that suits the needs of the production and service sectors. Moreover, should researchers wish to build upon their research and turn them into businesses, they will be able to set up companies.

Should startup businesses express an interest in doing business using their technology or innovation, they will be able to do so quickly in accordance to changes to technology.

This legal instrument is going to support a comprehensive innovation system and produce numerous startups that will mobilize innovative businesses, resulting in high value products and services that lead to a significant expansion of the country's economy.

Most importantly, it will demonstrate that the government's investments in research have been worthwhile and were able to generate income for the Thai people, create a culture of competition using knowledge and technology which will result in a true innovation-driven society.

However, the more the country pushes towards an innovative system, the faster we need to accelerate the production of personnel who are knowledgeable in management, research, technology, and innovationso that they are able to manage innovations and transfer technology, support the work of both the research and industrial sectors to be able to fully capitalize on research findings to bring revenue to the research sector.

At the same time, it will support the industrial sector and private sectors to utilize innovations in a fast and convenient manner.

It is the role of all governments to support and collaborate with the private sector in organizing programs to develop technological and effective innovation management that will lead to comprehensive utilization of research findings.

My fellow Thai citizens, September 24th is Prince Mahidol Day, or the anniversary of the death of Prince Mahidol Adulyadej who had made numerous contributions to the country’s medical and healthcare system as well as laid solid foundation for medical schools.

He also developed the effectiveness of medical curriculums and training of doctors, laying the foundations for the country’s medical and public health industries to meet international standards.

In remembrance of His Royal Highness’s contributions, I would like to invite everyone to make donations for purchasing medical equipment such as optical microscopes for eye surgery with peripherals for effectively viewing small tissue, x-ray machines for surgery, and endoscopes for the digestive tract for underprivileged patients at Siriraj Hospital.

Medical students at Siriraj Hospital and the Faculty of Medical Technology, Faculty of Nursing, and Faculty of Physical Therapy at Mahidol University will come to receive donations and offer Mahidol Day flags to people who have made donations in Bangkok and the neighboring provinces.

Those who would like to offer donations to the Siriraj Foundation can do it through the channels listed on the screen.

Finally, I would like to say that reform is change towards what is better. However, these changes must begin at the individual level. People must continuously seek out knowledge and never stop developing themselves.

I have heard from low income farmers who have, for a long time, conducted traditional farming practices but dared to open up and change. They were able to succeed by referring to information and sound advice. We will never be able to improve if we stick to our old ways.

Thank you, and I wish that everyone takes care of their health and that all families are happy and safe.

Sawasdeekrub.