

Bangkok Post **ฉบับพิเศษ****Towards the 21st Century**

by
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As a member of the teaching staff of Thammasat University, I cannot let this week go by without remembering the anniversary of the 14 October 1973 incident. Since those dark days Thai politics and society have come a long way. I can at least assure you that at Thammasat the teaching staff and students alike all strive to think and act for the good of the majority.

Once again this week politics must figure in our discussions. As we look ahead towards the 21st century many of us are wondering what kind of political landscape we can expect. This week and last it has been difficult to ignore the Palang Tam Party's Cabinet reshuffle, and similar changes are also due from New Aspiration. All in all, once again, the political temperature has been relatively hot.

However, to put this in perspective, let's look at some of the broader trends that are currently emerging in Thailand and put aside the personalities and petty conflicts for a moment. The first trend to note is our continually rising expectations of democracy. We are increasingly expecting and demanding that the country should be administered for the benefit of the people. With the downfall of General Suchinda Kraprayoon yet to be forgotten, we want our government to abide by correct democratic principles, and attention is strongly focused on democratic institutions for signs of efficiency and leadership.

Another interesting trend is the way the entry of successful professional people into politics has created a new atmosphere of optimism and excitement. Whereas before you had to be a member of parliament in order to become a Minister, this is no longer the case.

In Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra and Dr. Vichit Surapongchai, we have to admit that DP leader Chamlong Srimuang selected two very capable and ambitious young achievers to bolster his Cabinet lineup. Like a great many other prominent figures in current academic, business and political life, Dr. Thaksin is in his early forties.

I happen to know both gentlemen fairly well and I am happy to say that I can certainly vouch for the fact that their appreciation of human resources issues is supreme. I am convinced that Dr. Thaksin is a man of the future. For one thing he has already ably demonstrated that he can anticipate the shape of things to come by building his business in telecommunications. I would say that Dr. Thaksin is living proof to any doubters of the benefits of having vision.

As for Dr. Vichit, I also believe him to be a capable man, though one given to an independent style of work. After only 14 months as chairman of Bangkok Bank he wanted the powers that were supposed to go with the title and was not content to be boss in name only. Therefore we can see that he is not only capable but a man of principle also, which is a rare combination.

Whichever way the political situation unfolds, we wish both gentlemen well and hope that more capable people with integrity will become increasingly active in setting the political agenda for the future.

And so back to our particular concern: HR. Last week, besides addressing the HRI seminar on "Strategic Thinking and Action" at the Regent Hotel, I was also guest speaker at Kasetsart University's Mini MBA programme. It was obvious on both occasions that businessmen follow government policies on education and training very closely.

If we divide human resources into the "macro" or government level, and the "micro" or enterprise level, then we see that people concerned with HR at either level cannot afford to neglect the other. Therefore this week I would like to invite readers who are concerned with HR at micro level to consider how the big picture in terms of demographics, the expanding middle classes, education and training, and government finance, affect their own areas of specialisation.

Many of the people I met last week expressed their dismay at weaknesses they see in government policy on HR and they couldn't understand why it should be that way. Of course the answers aren't simple, but I think the following reasons explain at least part of it:

— Historically, Thailand has been rich in natural resources and so it has behaved like children who come from rich families who don't bother to try too hard because they know they will always be looked after.

— There is a widespread feeling that investment in HR does not pay for itself quickly enough in terms of increased productivity. As I have said before, in Thailand we tend not to take a long term view of investment, and so it is seen as too risky to spend money on HR development.

— Neither government policy makers nor management understand that HR represents one of their most valuable strategic advantages. They may pay lip service to the idea but in the end they view quality as being of less importance than quantity.

Finally, let me extend a warm welcome to our guest this week, Professor Yu Xiaodong, who is Professor and Vice Director of the Institute of Economic Research at the Chinese State Planning Commission of the People's Republic of China. Professor Yu was recently a guest of the HRI so I took the opportunity to interview him. As we have said before, we cannot ignore China when we consider what our lives will be like in the 21st Century. Such issues as the likely influence of the Chinese economy, the implications of the Thai-Chinese "special relationship," how to adapt our diplomacy, and ultimately, given our particular interest, the likely implications on our respective human resources.

See you next week!

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