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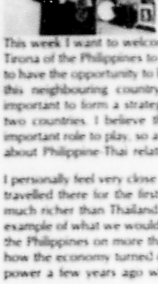


Towards the 21st Century

by
Dr. Chira Hongladarom, Executive Director, Human Resources Institute, Thammasat University.

This week I want to welcome Her Excellency Ambassador Rosalinda V. Tirona of the Philippines to our HRI/Post project. We are very honoured to have the opportunity to listen to her interpretation of developments in this neighbouring country. As the 21st century draws nearer, it is important to form a strategic alliance between the governments of our two countries. I believe that academics and the media also have an important role to play, so anybody who wishes to express their opinions about Philippine-Thai relations should freely do so.

I personally feel very close to the Philippines. As a young academician, I travelled there for the first time in 1972. At that time the country was much richer than Thailand and we tended to use the Philippines as an example of what we would like to become. Since that time I have visited the Philippines on more than 20 occasions, and have been sorry to see how the economy turned down, at least until President Ramos came to power a few years ago when things started to pick up again.

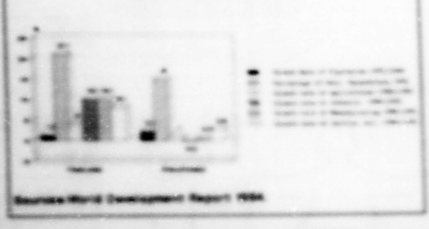
In discussing the Philippines, it is important to note that they experienced democracy much earlier even than the United States, and as for Thailand, we were still fluctuating between full and half democracy during the 1970s and 1980s.

As our domestic political events continue to unfold this week, I wonder what the future holds for Thai politics. The decision to bring an opposition party into the coalition confused many people, including academics in my own backyard at Thammasat University, where justice and ethics are given a high importance. I know that politics is frequently described as "the art of the possible", but still there ought to be some boundaries somewhere. As globalization becomes more influential in every aspect of our lives, politicians and the bureaucracy are very slow to make the necessary adjustments, and the events of last week only confirm my view on this.

Last week I travelled to Khon Kaen, where I am happy to announce, the Research and Development Institute (RDI) and the HRI will on December 28 host a gathering of 60 development experts in the hope of finding some solution to the problems of poor Northerners. This will be the second occasion when the HRI has shifted to Khon Kaen. Under the very able leadership of Dr. Mongkol Dandhanin, the RDI has earned a lot of respect for its work on rural development. As globalisation comes to rural communities like Khon Kaen the talk is of "survival," whereas the modern sector is already talking about excellence, re-engineering and improving quality. Who in our society can we count on to take care of the disadvantaged as they face the certainty of having to overcome ever greater difficulties just to survive? I will let you know if the gathering produces sufficient innovative ideas to raise the standard of living in the Northeast. I wonder if we can find some way to link the modern sector with the rural sector, such as through contract farming, agro-processing and modern management practices.

I am also very pleased to announce that in the third week of January, for the first time ever, the Bangkok Post and the Human Resources Institute of Thammasat University will join hands to organise a national seminar on Thailand's economic and political situation and the likely impact on human resources in 1995. It is customary for the HRI to organize several seminars of this type in a year, but I believe that these cooperative arrangements will make 1995 especially purposeful and productive. The event will challenge the audience to think about the impact of skills shortages, wage levels, work permits, industrial disputes, organizational change and productivity, etc. We will be inviting several leading figures to come and share their knowledge and experience with us. So as to enable a full sharing of ideas we will be using simultaneous translation between Thai and English, so everyone is welcome. Full details should be ready next week, so please make a provisional note in your diary.

I'd like to close my column this week by sharing some of the thoughts I expressed at a joint seminar organised by Nakornthon Bank and Thammasat University on "Getting Graduates Ready for Globalisation". In my view, what students learn at the universities is only a beginning, and they must not consider themselves successful simply because they graduate. On the contrary, they must be prepared to continue learning at work and expand their knowledge across many disciplines. University graduates these days are very lucky because the job market needs them. But it would be unwise to feel over confident. I recommend that they look to the long term more than the short term.

Finally, please look out tonight at 8.30 p.m. for my T.V. program in which we will be looking at the past 60 years of human resources development in Thailand. Our society is changing so quickly, and we must protect and support our people. They are very valuable.

See you next week!