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Towards the 21st Century

by
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As I write my column this week, I note that our HRI Post project is six months old already. Of course, so far as the whole issue of human resources is concerned this is only a beginning. People are still hungry for more ideas to implement in their own workplaces, and we hope to oblige them in the New Year.

Last week I was a guest speaker at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT), which was addressing human resources issues at both a macro and micro level. I was happily surprised and greatly encouraged to find that many foreign journalists (some follow this column and hope that we will continue. As I often tell them, in Thailand, we have a habit of failing to take a long term view of planning, and I see it as a major part of my job to stimulate discussion along these lines. However, one teacher can not reach everybody in person, so I hope this column will continue to spread the word as far afield as possible.

The discussions at the FCCT were interesting in many respects, not least as I felt that everybody was already aware how critical the situation has become and were anxious to find out what was being done to rectify it. We asked ourselves what the prospects were for the Thai economy over the next 10-15 years. Some of the journalists expressed the view that Thai leaders are very good at short term solutions to problems, but neglect to look any further ahead than 5-10 years.

One member of the audience expressed a strong feeling that in the long term Thailand will not be able to compete effectively with countries such as Malaysia because that country's leadership has effectively taken the initiative in planning for its future with its 20-20 vision programme.

The foreign journalists also expressed concern about the impact on economic growth on society, both in terms of the quality of life and the erosion of social values. In a borderless world, I wonder exactly what will be left of Thailand? It also concerns me that the young generation seems to care more for material things than happiness. If this is the case, then the on-going debate as to whether the younger generation behaves the way they do because the older generation has not prepared them properly, suggests that we are all responsible for these trends and we have to do something about it.

I am happy to be able to inform our readers that we are currently preparing another new project which I believe will have far reaching implications for human resources in Thailand. The project is a cooperative agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture to prepare and improve human resources among rural people. The project will introduce a new vision to the Ministry of Agriculture through the example of such people as Mr. Petipong Pungbun Na Ayudhya, Secretary-General of the Office of Agricultural Economics.

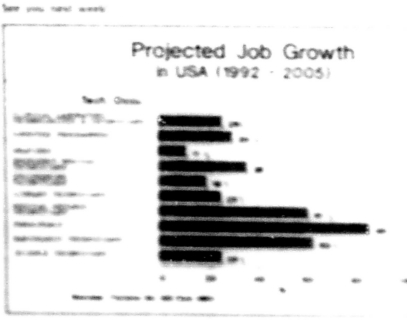
Last week I was a guest of His Excellency Mordechai Lewy, Israel's Ambassador to Thailand, and I hope to visit that country in the beginning of 1995 in order to explore possible cooperative arrangements with Israeli experts who may assist the project with the Ministry. My view is that if you equip rural people with information, entrepreneurial and management skills, then you are giving them the tools to survive. Thailand is still rich in agricultural produce, but we must improve the income generating capacity of the people involved. In this and other respects, I am sure that we can learn much from Israel's experience and expertise in the field of agricultural development.

The Ambassador and I both hope to start another project together early next year which will focus on Research and Development (R&D). Thailand lacks facilities for basic R&D of the kind that adds value to the economy and this makes it difficult to imagine which of Thailand's products will enjoy competitive advantages over the next 10 years. The country currently spends only 0.20% of Gross National Product (GNP) on R&D. Not only this, but under prevailing conditions most of the brain power with specialist ability in the fields of engineering, computers, and science prefer to work in the financial sector or management.

Therefore it is difficult for us to generate enough R&D activity alone. Nevertheless, since we are very entrepreneurial by nature, we do not lack the financial resources to contract researchers from overseas. In Israel we could enlist the R&D services of scientists working either in the private sector or lecturing in universities, and the same goes for the U.S. or India, and so on. I know that Dr. Olam Chaiprawat, President and Chief Executive Officer of Siam Commercial Bank has a similar plan in relation to Silicon Valley in the U.S., and I expect to see more such projects forthcoming and yielding positive results for Thailand. Any contracts entered into would naturally specify that the results would become the intellectual property of the Thai partners.

This week we welcome His Excellency P.H. Gibson, the New Zealand Ambassador, due to our column with an insightful look at how bilateral human resources relations between our two countries spill over into economic relations. But before you go, I would like to conclude this week by reminding you about our forthcoming HRI Post national symposium on Economics, Politics and their Impact on Human Resources. I am sure Professor John Butler's talk on leadership will be particularly interesting. We have found the date for February 1, 1995 huge to see you there.

See you next week.



This week Dr. Chira talks about:

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