



Towards the 21st Century

by
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IN THIS WEEK'S HRI/POST CO-OPERATION COLUMN Dr. Chira reviews his current activities and examines what can be done immediately in terms of skills development to prepare the country's workers for the challenges of globalisation.

By the time you read this week's piece, we will have concluded our HRI/POST High Level Seminar. At the time of writing, I am happy to inform you that the level of interest and anticipation is very high. If, as I fully expect, the seminar is successful, I am sure there will be many more such cooperative ventures in the future.

The role of the media in supporting human resources development is a very important one. We must keep working at it and overcoming any obstacles because awareness about human resources issues is still not widespread enough. People are looking for concrete action and results, and we must do what we can to see that they get them. On this score, we must at least congratulate the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) for realizing the importance of human resources, and giving it a prominent position in the 8th national development plan, which is currently being finalised.

Last week I was kept busy by the conference on globalisation and its impact on the labour market. The conference was jointly organised by the Regional Office of the International Labour Organisation and the Institute of Labour Studies in Geneva. It is interesting to note that despite the efforts of our government to increase competitiveness, the majority of our labour force has still only completed primary level education. Meanwhile, globalisation inevitably means that competitors such as China and Vietnam will emerge to draw potential investment away from Thailand, particularly in labour intensive industries.

Our industries are faced with a choice. Either they upgrade production to a higher level, or many of our workers will face severe difficulties in their lives, including lay-offs. At the very least the workers will be engaged in a constant battle to upgrade their skills.

I believe that this issue is so critical that we cannot afford the luxury of waiting. I have presented a paper on Thailand's efforts to meet the challenges of globalisation on the world of work in which I point out the extent of the difficulties unskilled workers will have to face. In the paper I ask who in the future will possess the vision and leadership to tackle such difficulties. Perhaps our new Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Mr. Sompong Amornvivat will have time to glance at this column, and perhaps he will find a little time left over from the day-to-day demands of his office to arrive at the ways and means to solve this problem.

I would recommend the following course of action:

- * Appoint a national committee to look into the impact of globalisation on unskilled labour.
- * Appoint committee members from among leading academics, the private sector and Non-government Organisations, together with bureaucrats from finance, commerce and other key areas.
- * Give the committee the task of looking for a long term approach to globalisation.
- * Seriously start to implement legislation providing for the establishment of a skills development fund. And make sure that it is run like a private sector organisation so that we can avoid making the same mistakes as we did with the office of social security, which supposedly has this responsibility at the moment.
- * Lend support to labour unions to help them to educate their leaders about business, management and globalisation.

While we are on the subject of skills development, I would like to echo the idea of the Chuan Government to invest an extra 2 billion baht in education. Half of the funds will be spent on subsidising private sector educational establishments and the rest will be used to provide educational loans to needy students. As I have said before, if the Ministry of Finance pays proper attention to the issue of human resources development, then I am sure the situation will improve.

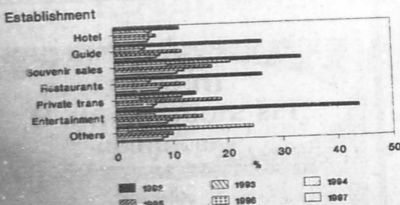
I am also pleased to hear that the Ministry of Education is planning to spend 500 million baht on upgrading teachers. My hope is that this indicates that the people at the Budget Bureau have now realised that while we spend so much money on physical capital, it is about time that we also invest in the people. We must also remember that, as we invest to improve our human resources working in education, we must also know how to manage them effectively.

On another tack, those of you who missed my television interview with Michael Hammer are welcome to contact the HRI, and next week we will cover the interview in the HRI/POST column.

This week we are fortunate enough to have another piece on tourism, this time written by Rob Dodson. I have not worked with Rob before, but I learned that he has been following the HRI/POST series with great interest. Tourism is a very important activity in Thailand. Perhaps by comparing our tourism policy with that of the U.K. we will be able to see some ways to improve it. There are a lot of dedicated staff at the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), and I hope that under the strong leadership of the chairman Dr. Savit Bhotiwitok, the organisation will rise to an even higher level. In Khun Seree Wangpaichitr, the new governor of the TAT we also have a hard working and sometimes underestimated leader who is fully committed to working for the long term benefit of tourism in Thailand. I hope the article gives everyone plenty of food for thought.

See you next week.

% of Manpower need in The Tourist Industry, 92-97



Source: Faculty of Statistics Applied, NIDA, 1992

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