



Towards the 21st Century

by

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IN THIS WEEK'S HRI—POST CO—OPERATION COLUMN, Dr. Chira examines what is being done to cement Thailand's position as the centre for HRD in Indochina, laments government inaction, and examines Alvin Toffler's reform list.

This week the Japanese organised an important brainstorming session entitled 'Forum for Comprehensive Development of Indochina.' Meanwhile, the press reported that our new Foreign Minister Dr. Krasae Chanawong has expressed a wish that Thailand should play a significant role in human resources development in Indochina.

I would like to add my own support to these ideas and developments. Indeed, Thailand must not only be the centre for human resources development, it must actually help to make it happen. Unfortunately, so far there has been plenty of discussion and debate, but little in the way of action. While competitors such as Malaysia and Singapore have quietly implemented many HRD programs with demonstrable success, I still doubt whether under the present government Thailand will contribute much to HRD in Indochina.

The National Security Council submitted a plan to establish an HRD centre for Indochina over a year ago, but so far nothing has come of it. The key to the success of such an organisation has to do with the way in which it is run. A flexible management system is needed, as well as the establishment of a private foundation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Prime Minister's office. I certainly hope that a decision will be taken on this matter very soon. In the meantime, economic activities will continue to expand in this region, and Thailand will continue to struggle to play a significant role and maximise potential benefits.

Over the last two years at the Human Resources Institute of Thammasat University we have provided training for over 200 senior officials from Indochina. Currently we are hosting 25 officials who are studying 'Market Transition and Human Resources Consequences.' In the beginning we received support from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, and subsequently we have been supported by the Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (DTEC).

I must say I do like the new leadership at DTEC, especially Director-General Khun Pichet Soontorpipit and his deputy Khun Sumathee Srisuchart, who both believe in networking and developing long-term relations with eminent foreign educational institutions. With these and other developments, my hope is that Thailand will not only assist Indochina in areas in which we are strong, such as management, macro- and micro-economics, agriculture and human resources, but that we will also be able to move forward into high-tech advanced training for such industries as energy, oil and gas and the environment.

I believe that the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, and its Metropolitan and Provincial sister authorities should combine their resources in order to tap funds from the World Bank or Asian Development Bank, or perhaps to access potential bilateral areas of support between Thailand and Germany, Korea, Japan or France. After all, as our recent celebrity guest Dr. Alvin Toffler suggested, knowledge is power and wealth! In my own capacity as a consultant to the Metropolitan Electricity Authority, I have already mentioned the approaching requirements for technical training in Indochina and also China. All we have to do is be ready.

We welcome Dr. Toffler as this week's guest of the HRI/POST column, together with Dr. Amnuay Virawan, leader of the newly formed Nam Thai Party. I recommend you read what they have to say, especially if you missed Alvin's stimulating lecture. His views are very significant, especially his recommendation that in order to equip ourselves to face the future there must be reforms in education and human resources, as well as a revolution in the way we produce and utilise information and knowledge. Nevertheless, to my mind the most crucial reforms of all are those of the public sector and political reform. Can we any longer afford to let politicians with little vision or knowledge lead our country into the future?

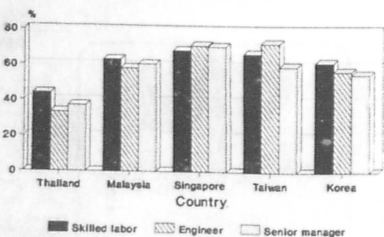
I am not optimistic about the prospects for change, even though I hope someone will prove me wrong. Everyone must be responsible for helping to spread what Toffler calls the 'third wave culture'. On the positive side at least 1995 is emerging as the year of the 'learning culture', with everybody seemingly hungry for good ideas and trying to implement them. Indeed this is why the HRI/POST column has already lasted eight months. We have received so much support not only from people in Thailand, but also from abroad.

Since knowledge is power, the media including the Bangkok Post can play a significant role in educating the general public. As for myself, I know that this is also no time to let up in my own work. The government can go on day in day out but if their customers, we citizens, are not happy or satisfied with the outcome, they are already in decline. As a result there has been an obvious 'power shift' away from government into the hands of the media and other organisations and communities, so they'd better watch out!

Finally, just to let you know, coming up this week there will be an interesting workshop on 'Human Resources Productivity: Concept, Analysis, Measurement and Implementation - A Case Study of Thailand's Public and Private Sectors' which Dr. Michael Hess, a friend of mine from the National Centre for Development Studies of the Australian National University will deliver together with myself in Bangkok during March 9-11 at The Imperial Hotel. If you'd like to join us you can call the HRI on 2238286 or 2265324 for further information. Also at Thammasat on March 9, we are organising 'งานฉลองวันเกิด' to celebrate the 79th birthday of Dr. Puey Ungphakorn of the Faculty of Economics. Interested parties are invited to attend free of charge in the small auditorium from 9.30 am to 12.00 pm.

See you next week.

Some Manpower-Related Competitiveness Indicator



Source: PECC, 1992