



Towards the 21st Century

by
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IN THIS WEEK'S HRI—POST CO—OPERATION COLUMN, Dr. Chira congratulates former Bank of Thailand governor Dr. Puey Ungphakorn on his 79th birthday and reviews the thrust of the 9th National Development Plan.

Last week we celebrated the 79th birthday of Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, a former rector of Thammasat University and Dean of the Faculty of Economics, and also a former governor of the Bank of Thailand. So for this week's HRI/POST Cooperation Column I have invited Dr. Naris Chaiyasoot, the current Dean of the Faculty of Economics, and Khun Staporn Kavitanon, Secretary-General of the Board of Investment and President of the Thammasat Association to write an essay each in honour of Dr. Puey.

I feel that my work at the Human Resources Institute of Thammasat University has also been influenced by Dr. Puey. While he was the Dean of the Faculty of Economics, he believed in preparing members of that faculty to become lecturers in human resources, and he managed to secure a substantial amount of assistance for this purpose from the Rockefeller Foundation. While he was Dean he sent nearly 60 lecturers on the Ph.D. program, many of whom, including myself, have returned to the Faculty of Economics, building it into one of the best in the region.

Dr. Puey also had the foresight to lay foundations for human resources development during the several years that he was governor of the central bank. The current governor Dr. Vijit Supinit is also one of Dr. Puey's proteges.

I remember how he personally approached my father Dr. Sunthorn Hongladarom, who was Minister of Finance during Dr. Puey's term as central bank governor, to allow me to join the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat. It was a very significant turning point in my life, and after 25 years of teaching at Thammasat both as a faculty member and as HRI Executive Director, I can honestly say that I have never regretted making this choice.

I hope my contributions towards education and knowledge have lived up to Dr. Puey's expectations. I personally benefited from working closely with him for several years. I remember how kind he always was towards his colleagues and how willing he was to teach, coach and transfer his experience to the younger generation. I consider Dr. Puey, together with Prof. Sanya Dhammasak, as my mentors during my junior years at Thammasat. So best wishes to Dr. Puey. Your long term vision and philosophy of investing in people still very much influences my thinking.

Perhaps this philosophy is still in evidence in the preparations for the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) which I participated in last week in Pattaya. I would like to congratulate the NESDB for gathering together such a diverse group of people from all walks of life. The NESDB's commitment to human resources as a central theme for the 8th Plan is admirable. There was a good atmosphere in Pattaya with everyone invited feeling a strong sense of participation. By contrast during Dr. Phisit Pakkasem's time at the NESDB the organisation performed like a close knit community with only a few people involved in planning. Now that Dr. Sumet Tantivejkul is in charge, everybody has become involved, and this is very good. However, it does make it difficult to make sense out of all the views and recommendations, and identify a clear direction in which the country should proceed and the means to achieve this.

For my own part, I feel that the key to the role of Human Resources in the 8th Plan should be as follows:

- Develop knowledge and skills required to cope with change through education and training;
- Reform of the educational system is essential - the question is how to accomplish this;
- Start reforming the bureaucracy to make it more responsive to the needs of the people;
- Reform the budgetary system with regard to human resources;
- Reform the political system.

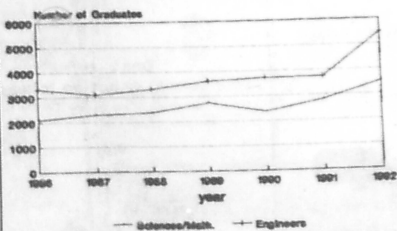
We must particularly bear in mind that human resources is both an economic and a social issue. As Khun Thamarak Karnpisit said in Pattaya, we need economists who understand human resources and human beings who can dream about desirable developments in society, but we still have to make sure that we invest enough in the actual people to make it all happen.

Ideally, if the 8th NESDP is successful in investing in people as well as taking action on environmental degradation and income distribution, then the 9th and 10th plans would be able to address other pressing social issues. Above all, I would like to see the 8th NESDP succeed in dealing with the education question, public sector reform and closing the gap between rural and urban. We all want this to happen, but the question is whether we can achieve concrete and measurable results.

The key to the 8th NESDP is therefore both direct and indirect. There have been some indirect benefits stemming from society's commitment to the people as evidenced by the Pattaya session, but so far we have still yet to see direct benefits. We must keep working at it.

See you next week.

S&T Bachelor's Degree Graduates (Engineers & Sciences/Math.)



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