



Towards the 21st Century

by
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IN THIS WEEK'S HRI-POST CO-OPERATION COLUMN, while keeping his eyes open for political developments, Dr. Chira relates his recent experiences with various international and local development activities focused on Chiang Mai.

This time next week we will know which parties the various political candidates will be standing for in the 2 July election. In the past couple of weeks new political developments have been taking place all the time, and as I have said before, the role of the mass media has clearly become a key factor.

Despite the predictions that one of the two big rival parties--the Democrat Party or Chat Thai Party--will win, two relatively new emerging leaders of political parties with international reputations have also appeared on the scene in Dr. Amnuay Viravan and Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra.

I believe it is essential for us to have political leaders of an international caliber, but whether our political system is actually able to produce such leaders remains to be seen. Nevertheless, whatever happens, with such dynamic personalities, at least politics in 1995 should feature some interesting debates and visions for Thailand's future. In the meantime, our work at the HRI goes on, and in fact seems to be expanding faster than ever. Despite all the political developments, I think we should keep our focus on human resources because as soon as the new government takes office, these are the issues which will have to be tackled.

Bureaucratic reforms, educational reforms and upgrading the skills of 4-5 million workers are the key issues determining whether Thailand can maintain its competitive advantage and narrow its internal income gap. Therefore any party with clear policies on the HR issue deserves our support.

Last week my work mainly took me to the Northern part of Thailand around Chiang Mai. The first task was to cooperate with the Faculty of Economics of Chiang Mai University to conduct training for 20 representatives from Vietnam, in what was the final week of a four week program which covered the topics of agriculture, agro-industry, tourism and the economics of the environment.

It struck me that I would like to see Chiang Mai develop its potential to become a regional center for Human Resources development in Indochina further, since it is close to Myanmar, Laos and Southern China. I find the atmosphere of learning and sharing in Chiang Mai so excellent, and I urge foreign guests who come to Thailand to also take the chance to witness with their own eyes the hospitality of our Northern capital.

During my stay there last week, I was also a guest speaker at a meeting of provincial agriculture officers, who had gathered to plan their work for the next five years. The Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives has a lot of highly skilled personnel, most of whom have scientific training, especially in the field of agronomy. Many of them also have post-graduate qualifications.

However, the point is that the Ministry heavily concentrated on providing advice and training to farmers about fertilizers, water systems, pesticides, seeds and so on, and yet the farmers' incomes did not seem to rise significantly. Therefore I hope that over the next couple of years I will be able to shift the emphasis from commodity-based training to income based training.

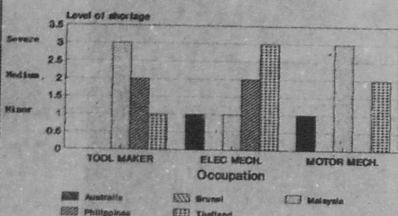
Of course, commodity based training is still important. But I proposed to the office of agricultural economics that it is best seen as a base on which to build a wider range of skills which they can use to increase their effectiveness. We must equip our farmers with up-to-date information about management systems, finance, marketing and entrepreneurial techniques, so that they are in a position to make sound management decisions for themselves.

The project has already started and I will keep readers closely informed of its progress. Imagine, one day the majority of farmers may achieve a regular and steadily rising income!

Last week the HRI also organised a workshop on 'vision' in the North. Although it did not attract as many delegates as the ones in Bangkok, we were still very happy that it generated interest in the topic and helped to disseminate new ideas into the provinces. We hope others will do the same.

See you next week!

Skill Shortage of Trade Level Occ. in APEC



Source: HRI, 1990.