



Towards the 21st Century

by
Dr. Chira Hongladarom, Executive Director, Human Resources Institute, Thammasat University.

IN THIS WEEK'S HRI-POST CO-OPERATION COLUMN, Dr. Chira underscores the importance of the Suanluang Rama 9 Royal Garden project as a rallying point for environmental concern in Thailand.

This week I would like to extend my best wishes to readers of this column from the Netherlands and England. In particular, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to their excellencies, the British and Netherlands ambassadors for arranging for me to observe the management of Kew Gardens and Keukenhof in their respective countries first hand.

I am also happy that my trip will give me the opportunity to relate another dimension of human resources issues to the readers of this column on my return.

The trip has been organised because as a member of the Executive Board of Suanluang Rama 9 Royal Garden, I am helping to prepare a new organizational structure. I am happy to say that we also have the assistance of three very distinguished Thai personalities in Khun Anand Panyarachun, Dr. Sanga Sabhasri and Khunying Chanut Piysooi.

As our economy has grown so rapidly in the last several years, the key question to ask is whether Thai people still have a good quality of life, since this is evidently something which does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with rapid economic growth. Bangkok is an excellent example of a fast paced economy, but if you ask the people if they feel satisfied with their quality of life, I think the answer will be obvious: absolutely not! Therefore we must take the opportunity to learn from more developed countries about their policies for achieving more balance in society.

Like progress and quality of life, Suanluang is another paradox. On the one hand it is situated right in the middle of affluent Bangkok, and on the other hand it doesn't have a professional management which can mould it into something which provides Bangkokians with a place to relax and enjoy life. My vision for the park is simple. Firstly, it should be one of the top botanical gardens in Thailand, where plants from all over the country can be found growing. Secondly, it should act as a centre of knowledge for the young generation, where they can go to develop an understanding of the importance of nature and the environment. And last but not least, it should be a place which honours some of the many achievements of His Majesty the King.

In order to accomplish this, we shall need to implement as efficient management as in Keukenhof and Kew Gardens, and already we have taken steps in that direction.

Human beings should not only maximise their material gains, we must also maximise the balance between economic development and quality of life. After all, the most important thing about economic development is that it should be sustainable.

I wonder which mechanisms will promote sustainable development in Thailand over the next 5-10 years, so that nature is preserved in the face of the continued economic growth. As I have written many times before, without a good natural environment and education, skills development alone will be insufficient. So we Thai people must keep on working and making the most of opportunities like Suanluang to spread knowledge to the younger generation in keeping with His Majesty's wishes.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to serve the King in this small way, and I hope our readers will support our joint efforts to ensure that Suanluang Rama 9 becomes a fitting example of the national heritage of Thailand.

See you next week!

