



Towards the 21st Century

by
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IN THIS WEEK'S HRI-POST CO-OPERATION COLUMN, Dr. Chira laments last week's tragic drowning of nearly thirty Thai commuters and school children. Identifying the root cause as the kind of economic growth which takes place at the expense of the quality of life, he urges that this time important lessons must be learned.

After returning to Thailand from Europe last week, I found we were facing another crisis in our society with the death of 24 innocent people at a landing stage at Prannok.

On behalf of the HRI/POST Project, I would like to offer our sympathy to all Thai people and in particular the families of those who lost their lives. Some of them were so young.

I often talk about a long term crisis of economic growth and the erosion of the quality of life in Bangkok, and this concern led to my becoming involved with improving the management of the Suanluang Rama 9 Royal Garden.

To me, last week's tragedy is an example of too much emphasis being placed on material gain at the expense of the quality of human life, or rather in this case 'lives'. As we look towards the 21st century, we must attempt to create a more balanced society. Therefore we must look carefully at this tragic event and learn from it.

The point is that rapid economic growth comes with a very high price tag. This is not unusual in any society, but for Thailand with its long history of civilization, we should not let the quest for material gain so dominate our concern for the quality of life. This is a good time for us all to reflect on what kind of society we want. What vision do we have for Thai society, and which are the main driving forces which can help us turn our vision into reality?

Over the past several years of our work at the HRI, we have tried to create a balance between the quality and competence of our people and the quality of life. We pushed for and succeeded in having social security legislation passed which will at least provide some protection for the people. In the future, we hope that the social security bill will be expanded to include retirement and unemployment benefits.

I talk a lot about educational skills development, but I never forget about the other dimensions to human resources. And one particular weakness which we must urgently address is the safety of the Thai people. Safety from injury at work, and safety from declining environmental conditions and air pollution, are all very important.

As the economy grows faster and faster, the value which society places on human life seems to be declining very significantly. But unfortunately, politicians don't take these issues into very careful consideration. In fact, none of the human resources issues, both from the point of view of improving human capabilities and improving the quality of life, receive much attention from political parties. I hope that a new party, such as Nam Thai perhaps, will be able to offer the people some hope for the future. Emergent new leaders like Khun Amnuay Virawan and Khun Thaksin Shinawatra, should be able to offer the people some new but realistic hope for the future.

In conclusion, this has been a sad week indeed for all of us. But hopefully this tragic event will bind us together and we will learn from it. I'm sure this will not be the last such tragedy. But even though the Thai people tend to forget things quickly, let us not forget the Prannok tragedy. Instead let us make some actual improvements. I would also add that I think the mass media has a responsibility to keep reminding people about the need to improve our society and the quality of life. Economic growth is nothing when the people do not have something to enjoy.

See you next week!

Shortage of Mechanical engineers in APEC



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