



Towards the 21st Century

by

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IN THIS WEEK'S HRI-POST CO-OPERATION COLUMN, Dr. Chira notices a rising tide of interest in politics, reminds the newly elected government of some priority areas and keeps attention focused on long term developments in Thailand and Asia.

The new government quickly took shape very soon after the outcome of the election became clear. At the same time it was also clear that the Thai people have started to take a closer interest in politics. The voter turnout in Bangkok was somewhat higher this time, rising to 47-50% from less than 40% in September 1992. Therefore we can expect that by the time of the next election, interest in politics will have expanded even further.

Speaking as someone who has had a keen interest in politics for several years, it is very obvious to me that politics and money go hand in hand. And believe me, it is not just about vote buying either. Rather it has to do with all kinds of election expenses, and they are going up all the time. According to one research institution total election expenditure this time amounted to 17,000 million baht, which due to inflation represents a 30% increase over 1992.

Many of my friends have asked me why all these people are willing to spend so much. In other words what are the potential benefits to them if they are successful in being elected? The fact is that people who decide to run in parliament either already have a great deal of money themselves or they have the support of well-funded groups. But what is at stake is the chance to play a part in running a 130 billion baht economy.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my wish that this government led by Khun Banharn will be able to pass urgent legislation to provide financial support to political parties. I think this is something that is done all over the world. The Thai government must therefore also take responsibility for making democracy viable, otherwise it is just going to continue to be a rich man's club.

Another wish of mine is that the 7 party coalition will combine efforts to fulfill some of their campaign pledges. I see some progress in the area of traffic if Palang Dharma and Prachukorn Thai are willing to tackle the problems jointly.

I also hope that the public will keep monitoring the government's activities and become a sort of check and balance.

Another interesting issue is that of political reform, which even Chat Thai leader Khun Banharn has said he is willing to undertake.

So much for politics. As an academic I want to get on with my own work and continue to bring the importance of human resources to the public's attention, especially in relation to the long term development of our economic and social agenda.

Last week, after the election had been decided, I was busy with two events. The first of these was to deliver a keynote speech on the need for re-engineering among Thai companies at an event organised by Value Vision, a company with a young, dynamic management team. One of the best things about this company is that it is willing to take the initiative in launching a 'knowledge business', which is something that has a high degree of risk in Thailand, when there are so many other business opportunities which could easily earn money for them. The point I made at the seminar is that, if you look 13 years down the road, the rosy picture we have of strong economic growth is not guaranteed. But if we successfully re-engineer, then this will help to sustain our long term growth. Since we live in such a competitive world, it is therefore essential that our leadership has vision.

Another interesting symposium last week entitled 'Message from Asia' was partly organised by the Japanese newspaper, Yomiuri Shimbun. I attended this event because I want to see Bangkok become a center of such regional activities and I think that it is important to send a message to this effect to the rest of the world, particularly the 'western world'.

Because of the strength of Asia's economies over the past 30 years - especially those of Japan, Asean, Korea and China - the global economy has certainly shifted towards Asia. Therefore, the future scenario of the world depends a great deal on the vision of Asian leaders, and meanwhile Japan will have to assume a larger role in the international arena. And what about China? With this food for thought I'll leave you until next week!

Obstacles of Thai Jewelry Industry

to develop to be new world center

