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Towards the 21st Century

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IN THIS WEEK'S HRI-POST CO-OPERATION COLUMN, Dr. Chira cites worker injury statistics to support his claim that more action is needed on this and other important labour issues and suggests that the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare as well as labour leaders will have to shape up in order to tackle them.

I would like to start this week's column with a few words about the labour issue. As Executive Director of the HRI for the past 15 years, I can see how much we have contributed to the development and debate of labour issues in Thailand. Since the foundation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare two years ago, my role in this area has increasingly come under the Ministry's jurisdiction. Nevertheless, I remain very close to the people involved and whenever an opportunity arises we still very much like to get involved.

involved.

There are two reasons for me wishing to raise this issue today. Firstly, this week'is national safety week. Unfortunately, along with the fast expansion of the Thai economy over the past 10 years, the number of injuries sustained at work lass also increased very rapidly. At the moment the rate of injuries has reached approximately 200,000 cases per year, representing a significant jump from the 30,000 annual cases recorded just 10 years ago.

Last week, the provincial labour office at Rajaburi invited myself and others to speak to manufacturers in the Bann Pong area. Bann Pong, Rajaburi is a new but fast expanding area for industrial development in such sectors paper, car assembly and food processing. Rajaburi is not very far from Bangkok, and it has succeded in attracting an appressive number of sunificulties. In a few years time, thanks to the supply of natural gas from Myannar and new electricity plants, Rajaburi will also start to play an important role in the energy sector.

I think that the issue of safgty at work has reached such proportions that it is

ortant rote in the energy sector, in that the issue of safety at work has reached such proportions that, it is two setup a government department to tackde the problem. Last year the figet for the safety of our 4-5 million strong industrial workdgrea and 6-7 ion others in the services sector was only 44 million baht. We should get by from the idea that safety costs too much. I have read research which wis that factories with good safety records also seem to geografe better ductivity.

audience at Rajaburi that I would try to raise awareness and more concern about safety issues, and I hope the readers of this will do the same. The meeting also discussed whether the governary can yeler cut policy on this issue, and we came up with the answer ortunately public interest in this area is week.

that unfortunately public interest in this area is weak. The second reason I want to talk about labour is that I would like to prompt more discussion about the role of the Ministry of Labour. I was one of the supporters of the formation of the new Ministry of Labour. I was one of the supporters of the formation of the new Ministry and I was very pleased that after manywears of waiting we were successful. Nevertheless, I still think that the Ministry's role can be improved still further. I keep telling the seminar officials at the Ministry that they should try to develop a new method of working. Because the Ministry is a spin-off from the Ministry of Interior, sometimes some of the current officiens still behave as if abour were a national security issue. In fact labour is more closely aligned to economic and social development issues. We must try to enhance the potential of sur labour force in order to be able to meet the rigours of global competition. At the same time we have to understand the nature of market economies, especially the fact that the market makes no provision for losers. Therefore we need more protection of unskilled labour, child labour and women workers and in order to achieve this, trade unions must be encouraged to play a more constructive role.

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The Ministry of Labour will celebrate its second anniversary next month. When the new Ministry was first set up I was happy to have the opportunity to conduct a "vision workshop" for it, and now two years later, Permanent Secretary Mr. Sawai Prammanen e has asked me to review its progress. This is what the HRI is here for, to offer direction to whoever feels that we can be

siders capable of taking on an influential role, ext week the HRI is involved in two big events, the first is the cullimination at Thai-Vietnamese research project on Off-Farm Employement which has seen undertaken in Vietnam's Hi Hung Prosince. The HRI has established a ose relationship with our Vietnamese counterparts at the State Planning ommittee and the Development Strates Institute under the strong leader-ing of its president Dr. Luu Bich 'Ho, and today we are presenting the idnings of our joint project at the Royal River Hotel. Then following the eminar, we will assemble with top officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and co-operation with the Office of Agricultural Economics and report to them out the future of human resources, income generation and globalization in lation to the agricultural sector in Thailand. In the afternoon we will ask the eminar officials to conduct a workshop on the Ministry's vision. Both events rould be interesting and if you want to join in just contact us.

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