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Feature:

NIA HEAD REPORTS ON HIS OBSERVATION TRIP
IN THAILAND

Following are excerpts of an interview by the Tien Thu (Progress) magazine with National Institute of Administration rector Vu Quoc Thong upon his return from Bangkok late in March after observing a seminar on executive development for high-ranking Thai government officials:

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Question: We learned that last March you went to Thailand as an observer of a seminar on executive development for high-ranking Thai government officials. Would you give us some information on this observation trip?

Answer: At the invitation of Thammasat University in Bangkok last March, I went to Thailand to participate as an observer in the seminar on the development of leaders and executives in Thai government agencies. This trip was supposed to be undertaken by the head of the In-Service Training Section of the NIA, but at the last minute he could not make it due to the demands and responsibilities of his position.

Question: Mr. Rector, we were told that the seminar was conducted in the Thai language. Did you encounter any difficulty while you were observing?

Answer: Our aim in this observation trip was to find out how the executive development programme was carried out, what kind of executive development training they have applied and what were the results obtained so that we could benefit from their experience in the in-service training programme for executives in our country. To this end, I attended the seminar with the help of a Thai interpreter. In addition, I visited with people responsible for the seminar programme.

Question: Could you tell us where and how long the seminar took place? From the materials we have received the fifth seminar was held at Hua Hin near Bangkok.

Answer: As you just said, the fifth seminar was held at Hua Hin, but the sixth seminar was held from March 23 to March 30, 1962 at Sraburi, a small newly-established town, a migrant centre 180 kms from Bangkok. This location was chosen

to make participants, once away from their offices and the noisy capital, forget about their daily office work and their own occupation in order to better concentrate on the seminar. The participants had the opportunity to live together, to work with one another during seven consecutive days, and to make friends. This close association had the good effect of promoting cooperation when they carry out their duties later.

Question: Mr. Rector, what was the composition of the seminar? We know that this was a seminar on executive and leader development of Thai government agencies and that participants must be at the staff level, but we would like to know more specifically what positions did these participants hold so that we could judge their enthusiasm toward in-service training. Or was this only a routine task, a work which was carried out against their own will as one has seen in many countries?

Answer: The seminar was attended by 23 participants, most of whom were service directors in Thai government ministerial agencies including Defence, Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office. In addition to directors-general, directors and deputy directors, there were a General and an Air Force Marshal who both represented the Defence Ministry. Usually, each ministry sends one or two representatives, with the exception of the Interior and Defence Ministries which send three and the Prime Minister's Office which sends four. Their enthusiastic participation was due to the great concern of Thai leaders in in-service training. The proof was the presence of the Thai Prime Minister at the first session. He also opened the seminar and participated in one of the sessions. At the sixth seminar, the Deputy Prime Minister, who also is the Defence Minister and the President of Thammasat University, General Thanon Kittikachorn, despite the international state of emergency came to inaugurate the seminar. The trip of the Deputy Prime Minister to Sraburi, located 180 kms from Bangkok, was a significant gesture which showed the great concern on the part of the Thai leader group towards in-service training. This was also a great encouragement which prompted the high-ranking officials to participate actively in the discussions.

Question: You just mentioned that the Thai Defence Ministry had sent three representatives to the seminar, a General and an Air Force Marshal. This makes us think that in Thailand, people conceive that organization methods and management principles are not only applied to administration but can be effectively applied to the Army.

Answer: As you have noticed, in the field of in-service training in Thailand, no distinction is made between civilians and the military; for that reason, the high-ranking Army officers attended the seminar. In fact, the executive principles, whether in the army or in the administration, are the same. In America, materials on in-service training prepared by the U.S. Air Force have been widely disseminated in administrative agencies as well as in factories. These materials, which were first prepared for the Air Force's use, were later found valuable not only to Army units but to outside agencies as well. They have been translated into Vietnamese and are available at the NIA library to "Progress" readers.

Question: Mr. Rector, the NIA has organized many seminars and you have participated in many international seminars. In your opinion, what were the highlights of this seminar from the standpoint of organization?

Answer: There are few things more worthy of our attention than the role of "resource person," which we can roughly translate as "advisor," in the Thai seminars and the relationship between the 6th seminar and the previous ones. These were the highlights.

Question: From what we know, the seminars organized in America also have "resource persons" whose duty is to report to the seminar on technical matters and to clarify topics for the benefit of participants so that they can take part in discussions. Sometimes they act as advisors on these matters. Did the "resource person" that you mentioned in the seminar in Thailand have any other role?

Answer: At the Thai seminar, the main topics fundamental to the seminar were repeated from the first to the sixth seminar, which I had the occasion to observe.

Generally the seminars discuss the following topics:

- Executive planning
- Human leadership
- Organization
- The right man on the right job
- Decision making
- Ethics in government
- Communication and coordination
- How to develop an in-service training office.

The above-mentioned topics seem to be the permanent ones on the agenda. A number of participants who had shown particular ability in the previous seminars were designated to conduct discussions in the following seminars. They were called "Seminar Leaders." Because seminar members are very busy and sometimes in need of an expert's ideas, they had recourse to a "resource person," that is an advisor who helped them in the background, who supplied them with necessary documents as well as preparing reports. The "resource person" for the leaders of the sixth seminar as well as of the previous ones are university staff, research specialists or in-service training personnel of Thammasat Public Administration Institute. Another interesting point is the close relationship between the past and present seminars shown by the fact that participants of past seminars are assigned to prepare the program for the following one, therefore they can add secondary problems to the above unchanged topics of the program, adding topics which were not discussed before whose omission was considered as a shortcoming. It is due to this procedure that they have the occasion to dissect all topics related to the program of executive development.

Question: The close relationship between past and present seminars is very useful in the sense that participants of past seminars can draw experience from them to better the following ones. Mr. Rector, would you please tell us whether the National Institute of Administration has any intention to apply this valuable experience of Thailand in the organization of seminars on in-service training?

Answer: I have the intention to report to upper echelons on the experience I have obtained recently in Thailand. Of course, I would like to suggest that Vietnam apply the experience of a friendly country in the preparation of training programs for executive personnel as well as for the organization of seminars for Training Officers. I would like to emphasize here an organization called "alumnae groups" of the seminars on the development of executive and leaders in Thai government agencies. They meet once a year to discuss and to exchange experience encountered in their work management. This is one of the aims of the annual meeting; however, they have another more important aim, that is the meeting will help the executives in the Thai government understand each other better and will create close ties between the executives and facilitate their relations in their work so that paper work can be greatly simplified. Here is a concrete example: because of the already existing friendship between them, they can solve a problem over the telephone without having recourse to the exchange of memorandums which usually greatly complicate operations.

Question: Mr. Rector, from what we know, the Indiana University advisory group (U.S.A.) has been acting as advisor to Thammasat University in Bangkok since 1960 on matters related to public administration in which there is the in-service training of Thai government employees. According to the seminars already organized in Thailand for executives, we notice that the in-service training of Thai government employees starts from the executives downward because Thai leaders feel that if the high-ranking officials accept the in-service training then this idea will filter down to the low echelons. In our country, the in-service training starts from the low echelon up to the medium, then ultimately to the executives. We would like to get your opinion about these two opposite solutions to see which one is correct?

Answer: It is really difficult to decide which solution is better. Thailand had its own reasons when it started in-service training for the executives first. At present, in the Thai government, there are 550 executives, but each seminar can accommodate only 20 or more. Every year they organize 3 or 4 seminars for nearly 100 executives. It requires at least 5 years to complete the in-service training of 550 executives. Compared with Thailand, our country is in a different situation which can be described as a difficult one. We have to save time and to move very fast. At present, we have already set up the base for in-service training in various places and we have organized many courses for in-service training officers at central and local levels. We are going to discuss the program of executive development soon. Although these executives have never attended an in-service training course, they are already prepared for it through conferences of foreign experts organized by the NIA in 1956 at the Saigon City Hall. In reality, we encounter more difficulties than does Thailand in the implementation of in-service training. This is due to the particular conditions of our country which require special efforts from civil servants at every level to carry out the daily work. Of course, in-service training is very important but we cannot give too much concern to it for fear of neglecting our daily duties. At present, we have many important and urgent problems such as the fight against Communism which take priority over in-service training.