

Integrated effort on vocational education

The global community has made significant strides over the past few decades in achieving technological advancement, digital interconnectivity and borderless communication which have redefined the way modern economies operate and interact with one another. This "new normal" characterized by constant innovation which results in a steep and constant learning curve epitomizes the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The phenomenon serves as a wake-up call for all nations large and small, developed and developing, ocean-rimmed and landlocked alike: to remain competitive and to thrive or to stay complacent and fade into irrelevance.

In response to this global phenomena, Thailand is putting itself on the map as an important player in the 4IR era by implementing its Thailand 4.0 policy. Prime Minister Gen. Prayuth Chan O-cha called upon all sectors in Thai society for an all-out effort to gear the country's core economic competencies through value-added innovation, complete digitalization and increased workforce capacity by 2032. There are 10 target sectors such as food, agriculture and biotechnology, medical and wellness tourism, smart electronics, next generation automotive, aviation, logistics, digital, biofuel and robotics. All sectors are working in tandem to fortify, first and foremost, Thailand's human capital to increase the country's competitiveness in partnership with global companies and foreign countries for all Thais' prospects for sustainable prosperity.

One such agency spearheading these efforts is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand. His Excellency Foreign Minister Don Paramatvinai sees that part and parcel of the Ministry's key competencies is to act as a conduit in connecting other countries' key strengths and expertise with Thailand's needs. The Foreign Ministry has left no stone unturned in identifying the best possible knowledge and skills creation the world has to offer. This ranges from opening doors for Thai Airways to enter into a partnership with Airbus in establishing the latter's regional hub of aircraft service station in Thailand and partnering with Japan and Germany in scaling up the capacity of Thai vocational students. With more than 55 million passengers making use of its facilities and more than 100 airlines operating in the country's air space, the Airports Council International ranks Thailand's Suvarnabhumi Airport as the 20th busiest air passenger hub in the world in 2016 reflecting the exponential growth of air travel in the region and beyond. With the high number of aircrafts comes the needs for maintenance and service, and this is why one of Thailand's key future industries lies in aviation. Serving as the regional hub for aircraft services, Thailand's through its national carrier, Thai Airways, it has already joined forces with Airbus to set up a maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facility or TG MRO Complex Development at U-Tapao International Airport serving multiple types of light and heavy aircrafts.

In building quality workforce that forms the backbone of Thai industries in the 4IR era, integrated effort of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education - has brought good practices from Japan and Germany and other potential partners to strengthen the curriculum of vocational education by focusing on skill upgrade and practical experiences for vocational students who will form an integral driving force of Thailand 4.0. With Japan, Japanese KOSEN-style vocational institutions has been initiated to produce market-ready workforce with engineering knowledge and industrial skills crucial for industrial innovation. Vocational students undergo on-the-job training at work sites along with the necessary knowledge in engineering that enables them to think further and innovate new paths forward for the industries. If they so choose, these students can

study further towards a degree in engineering. With Germany, experts have been dispatched to coach vocational schools and technical colleges on curricula focusing on on-site practical study and internships. Major German companies in Thailand such as BMW, SIEMENS, Daimlers, etc provide internships for qualified students. Special trainings are provided to teachers from vocational colleges throughout the country through several workshops held in the past four years in both Germany and Thailand. Recently Thai-German Meister Workshop has been initiated aiming to train personnel who can become chief technicians and supervise students during their internship in industries. On-site practical learning must help students find real-life innovative solutions through problem-based and project-based learnings. These personnel will, in turn, serve as the foundation for Thailand's new S-Curve of future key economic sectors.

The Memorandum of Understanding to be signed between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and the Office of Vocational Education on September 29 will mark key steps toward establishing concrete partnerships with potential institutions abroad. Various activities that follow should help enhance the capacity of Thailand's vocational education, and that will ultimately contribute to the upgrade of our workforce's apprentice skills.
