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SUBJECT : King Bhumibol Adulyadit's views on Development of Hilltribe Peoples

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The Royal Family, particularly His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadit and H.R.H. the Princess Mother, have traditionally demonstrated keen personal interest in the hilltribes of Northern Thailand. By participating in extensive visits to remote areas, organizing volunteer medical programs to supplement official governmental services and by establishing philanthropic contributions to further developmental work among hill peoples, His Majesty has exerted valuable leadership in an area in which effective RTG action has been lacking.

Though the announced policy of the RTG is enlightened and beneficient, few resources are allocated to this complex problem and no comprehensive program of Tribal Development has yet been conceived by the RTG to meet the needs of this significant minority group. Periodically, however, the government has made attempts to consolidate on-going programs into a more coordinated effort.

On November 9 His Majesty expressed his appreciation to the combined Rotary Clubs of Bangkok for their financial contributions in a remarkable speech which demonstrates His Majesty's intimate knowledge of the problem, his sensitivity to tribal attitudes and the scope of his personal involvement in remedial measures. Significant portions of His Majesty's speech are repeated in the attachment to this airgram.

UNGER

Attachment

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Public Address by His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadit
in the Rotary Club of Bangkok
9 November 1970

QUOTE Last year the Rotary Club of Bangkok gave a Gala Dinner, And I was also asked to pay for it with a speech.

I suppose the payment was excessive, because the Dinner Committee came to see me a month later and presented me with a refund of 306,700 baht.

I promised to spend that sum in a proper way. So it became the Hilltribes Programme Fund.

This is approximately how it was spent:

200,000	baht for hilltribe schools;
200,000	baht for co-operative shops;
240,000	baht to establish an experimental station for temperate zone fruit trees and other plants;
30,000	baht to set up rice banks for Karens and Lua;
20,000	baht for a training course at the Chiang Mai University for hilltribesmen and Border Patrol Police teachers;
30,000	baht to develop Pa La-oo, an area occupied by Karens, west of Hua Hin;
130,000	baht for other items such as rice, pigs for stock, medicine and other expenses.

The total is 850,360.25 baht.

Attachment
Page 1 of 1
Bangkok - A-

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This report will perhaps shock you in that it is a rather "unbalanced" account. The expenditure greatly exceeds the revenue. But rest assured, for following the Bangkok Rotary's contribution others followed suit. The total sum of donations being 1,065,575 baht, we are out of the red by more than 200,000 baht.

Anyway, I do not think that finding the money is such a big problem. The problem is how to spend it properly, to get the best out of the money spent.

In this problem, three M's are involved (no reference to recording tape), and the formula is M1+M2+M3=Success.

M1 is the money, M2 is men and M3 stands for method.

M1 is used by M2 with M3.

M1 has been provided by donations extracted from your pockets and mine. M2 comprises the men, and women, who participate in our work. They are chosen from all walks of life and different professions. From the economist who used to be Minister of State to the police constable who is a teacher in the Meo village.

They are all volunteers, no special pay nor career advancement. They are willing to go to remote, difficult regions, exposed to many kinds of danger. They normally go in their free time, that is mostly on Saturdays and Sundays.

When a team of agricultural experts, land developers or doctors go to visit the hill villages, they use an Air Force or police helicopter. The pilots are those who fly and fight in Chiang Rai and Nan, and who are in Chiang Mai for a well-earned rest.

Coming to M3, the method of work, simplicity is the key principle. It is to give assistance as quickly and directly as possible. No red tape. No committee was formally set up, so no prolonged session was necessary.

Consultations were made in the field, sometimes at lunch near a waterfall, or while visiting a hill village. This is exactly what happened in the case of the experimental station on Doi Pui,

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Chiang Mai. We were inspecting some wild peach trees near a Meo village and were discussing that, to increase the income of the tribesmen, it was imperative to introduce better varieties of cash crops.

The cash crops, if successfully introduced, could gradually replace opium and hopefully become the main source of the hilltribe's income, I am saying this not because of a moral or law-abiding motive, but strictly for economic reasons.

You see, the hilltribe is already aware of the diminishing economic value of opium. Early this year, while visiting some Meo villages in Chiang Mai, I asked the Meos how much a family earned on average from the annual selling of opium. The answer was 3,000 to 5,000 baht. When asked how much the annual selling of fruit would bring, the reply was that local variety of peaches would bring 4,000 to 12,000 baht!

It was then that we thought we had the answer. We could improve the wild fruits, such as local peaches, by grafting. We could also choose other fruits which are high-priced and in great demand, such as apples, pears and chestnuts. In fact, there is a great number of wild trees and other plants that could be used, including some medicinal herbs.

These present no marketing problem. And the hilltribe will not have to compete with the lowland as the crops cannot be grown successfully there.

It was therefore decided that an experimental station should be set up to conduct research on cultivation and grafting of temperate zone trees and plants.

The official way would require drafting of the programme, budget, cabinet approval, selection of personnel, appointments, etc. The site of the experimental station would have to be selected and purchase, the crops bought and planted. Then we would have to wait for three or four years before the trees were fully grown and ready for the research.

As it happened, we did not have to wait for three of four years. A plantation, located at 3,000 feet above sea level, and with some of the required, full-grown crops, was purchased for 200,000 baht. Also 40,000 baht was set aside for running expenses.

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The plantation was transformed into the experimental station which immediately went to work. The station is now being run by a Kasetsart University team. With the birth of the experimental station, donations and aid from local and foreign sources followed.

Meanwhile, a short seminar-type training course was given at the University of Chiang Mai to selected hilltribesmen and Border Patrol Police teachers. The training was on temperate climate zone fruit cultivation and grafting, vegetable and vegetable see production, and animal husbandry.

In fact, even before the establishment of the station and the training course, we had already tried to introduce tree grafting to a hilltribe -- in this case a Meo. This was done by actual, simple demonstration, the Meos watched quietly without asking any questions or making any remark.

Sometime afterwards, during our stay in Chiang Mai, the Queen and I went on foot to visit the Meo village. On our arrival, a Meo excitedly told us that he had successfully performed tree grafting. Then he invited us to have a look. We had spent over one hour hiking to the village, and some of us had not quite recovered. So someone asked how far the trees were, and the Meo said: "Not far. Only a short walk."

Nearly one hour later, we arrived at the trees and the Meo proudly showed us the result of his work. He had done a rather good job of it. It showed that these people have the ability to absorb new techniques quite readily. It also showed that they are ready to accept us and trust us. That "short walk" had been worthwhile. We were out of breath, but the knowledge that they had treated us like fellow Meos was more than compensation.

That "short walk" gave us an insight into the Meo's idea of distance: it was not short by our standard and, by looking at the grafted trees, we shared in the Meo's pride in his success. In working out a programme to help people, it is necessary that you know the people you intend to help. We did it by personal contact with the Meo and by sharing with his experience. The contact thus

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made has brought about another most important factor: that is the cooperation of the hilltribes who are beneficiaries to our programme. Without the cooperation on their part, our programme might not be of much success.

You will recall that earlier I had emphasized the necessity of enlarging Rotary acquaintance to include those who will be able to help you. In carrying out my programme, my representatives had strictly followed this principle.

Unfortunately, there is no shortcut and one does not know a people by merely memorizing some research papers prepared by research centres. To know the hilltribe, you must meet them and like them. This takes time. Luckily, those who handled my programme took the trouble to make frequent visits to the hilltribes.

So gradually we came to know the hilltribe, but not without problems. A few years ago, a Provincial Police source reported that some Lahus did not keep the pigs that had been distributed to them. Instead, they slaughtered the pigs and served them at subsequent feasts. The report was quite disturbing as the Hilltribe Programme was definitely not gastronomical in nature. However, we remained calm and composed.

Meanwhile, investigation was conducted which revealed that only a small, negligible number of pigs was slaughtered. It was not because the King's pigs were more appetising, but because each had one nail too many. This was considered a bad omen by the Lahus and the pigs had to be sacrificed at once. Otherwise the spirits might become angry.

Needless to say, since then the nails of each pig have been carefully counted before distribution, and the Lahus' sacrifice list considerably shortened.

Many people seem to think that the hilltribe distrusts strangers and visitors, and as a result makes any development effort a difficult one. While there is some truth in this, one must consider the hilltribe's isolation.

The hilltribe lives in the mountains, away from the majority, almost beyond the protective and assisting reach of the society. Such an isolated community tends to be self-centred. But this does not mean that the hilltribe rejects visitors.

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On the contrary, when they are assured of the visitors' sincerity, the tribesmen welcome the visitors with open arms. This has been illustrated many times during my various visits to the hilltribes.

Usually, our group consists of volunteers of different professions: agriculturists, irrigation specialists, veterinarians, school teachers, doctors — to name a few. Some would arrive at the village hours before, and would have already begun to establish contact with the hilltribe when the main party arrived.

Almost every time, the doctors would be regarded with apparent suspicion. At the end of the first visit, only a few would have submitted themselves to the doctors' examination and treatment.

However, on a second visit the scene would change completely. The classroom which was used as clinic and dispensary would be packed with patients who suddenly appeared from nowhere. The frustrated doctors would find it almost impossible to move or breathe. They would soon realise that they were the most popular. Being the last to leave, they would also know that they had a new friendship.

When we go on our visits to the villages, after the usual inspections of possible improvements in various fields, we sometimes visit the headman's house. On one occasion our host came out with a bottle of moonshine and poured out some in a cup and took a sip, nodded in satisfaction, then poured another cupful and presented me with it.

After that he passed the bottle to his son who served the others present. This mildly embarrassed the police officers escorting us. But it showed the hospitality of these good people. Going further than simple hospitality, the headman entrusted another bottle of the home brew to the police general, for us to take home.

The hilltribe's consideration was illustrated further in another incident. During our stay in Chiang Mai, we are accustomed to go on foot to hill villages. Each walk normally takes one or two hours.

One day a Meo, having observed how we were panting after climbing the mountain to and from his village, whispered to a Border Patrol Police constable that he would like to offer us the use of his mules, so that we should be saved from premature heart attack. I was deeply touched by the gesture which is a clear proof that the hilltribe understands full well the spirit of the counter-part fund.

Perhaps another anecdote is in order. I have mentioned the training course on cultivation and grafting given to the hilltribes and the Border Patrol Police teachers. At the end of the training, a number of grafting knives and other tools was given to the tribesmen prior to their return to the hill.

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To my surprise some time later, a sum was sent to me by the tribesmen. The sum was so modest that it could not be considered the payment for the tools.

Inquiries revealed that the sum was sent according to OUR own customs. A sharp tool, like a weapon, cannot be given to a friend for it might ruin the friendship. It has to be bought. Hence the payment.

Knowing people is always enlightening. It is more so in the case of the hilltribe as very little is known about them. I do not intend to present here a synopsis on the hilltribes in Thailand. But I would like to say that our findings confirm those of distinguished anthropologists and sociologists; that the hilltribe has been found to be perfectly human; that, as a result, they are subjected to covetousness, anger and ignorance, not less than we are.

Our findings also reveal that the hilltribe maintains its standard of behaviour, its own culture, which is not less refined than ours. And once the natural or instinctive barriers, such as doubt and fear, are removed, the true hilltribe will be found to be understanding, reasonable and considerate.

These qualifications are enough for us to accept them, and for them to contribute -- or to be allowed to contribute -- to the improvement of the community.

Perhaps my observations in regard to the hilltribes may be applied generally to the Thai community as a whole. On the first encounter there is a cool reserve which is almost British in its nature.

Then comes the formal introduction and after that there is nothing but hearty friendliness and mutual understanding. It is only through mutual understanding that any solution to problems and any lasting improvement on existing conditions can be accomplished.

I have given you a sketchy account of how your donation was used, by whom, and how it effected both the deliverer and the beneficiary. Before closing, I must stress that my speech is by no means a report of success. Rather, it is a report of an experiment, an attempt which still leaves much to be desired. It is a continual job which requires constant follow-ups.

Next month, my family and I leave for Chiang Mai, close to the work and the problems. As you may have guessed, we will be making more visits to the hilltribes. Our work is not yet done. "Rotary is an ideal in action" and action is worth more than speech. Let me end my speech now for more action. **UNQUOTE**

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