

# My Career in Education

A Lecture by

**Her Royal Highness  
Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn**

At the Third Thailand-US Education Roundtable  
At Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand  
On November 7, 2005

## Message from Chairman of the Thai Steering Committee

The Thailand-US Education Roundtable Steering Committee, of which Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn has kindly accepted to be the Honorary Chairperson, organized the First Thailand-US Education Roundtable hosted by Srinakharinwirot University and the Office of the National Education Council (ONEC currently known as OEC) in 2001. In 2003 the Second Roundtable was hosted by the University of Pennsylvania. The Third Roundtable was hosted by Dhurakij Pundit University (DPU) and the Office of the Education Council (OEC), during November 7-8, 2005. This Third Roundtable was held to commemorate the auspicious occasion of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary.

On this occasion, Her Royal Highness graciously accepted to preside over the opening of the Roundtable and to give a keynote address, "**My Career in Education**". This keynote address demonstrates Her work in relation to education development at all levels, from early childhood to higher education.

To increase the opportunities to access education and to find employment, Her Royal Highness has provided guidance, help, and financial support to assist the disadvantaged children and youth, especially those living in the remote areas. Her Royal

Highness demonstrated Her well-roundedness and insight regarding the integration and interrelationship of education to all parts of life. The visit of Her Royal Highness to many education institutions in all regions helped improve the quality of education in Thailand. It is worthwhile to consider in more detail Her approach to the implementation of many Rolly-Initiated Projects and activities in schools and universities, such as, agricultural practice, health education, information technology for education, and education for talented and disadvantaged groups.

Her Royal Highness' tireless dedication to the development of the quality of Thai education is well reflected in the Royal Address, "My Career in Education". The expression of this sentiment in a lively and accessible manner should be of benefit to the readers who would like to adopt the knowledge gained from this book and adapt it in their practice.

On behalf of the Thai Steering Committee, we would like to extend our profound gratitude to Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn for giving permission to publish this valuable book.



Professor Sippanondha Ketudat, Ph.D.  
Chairman of the Thai Steering Committee and  
Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Dhurakij Pundit University  
July, 2006



## Preface

On November 7, 2005, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn graciously presided at the inaugural session of the Third Thailand-US Education Roundtable, held at Dhurakij Pundit University. On this occasion, Her Royal Highness also graciously gave a keynote address on **“My Career in Education”**.

From the Royal Address, one could clearly appreciate Her Royal Highness’ insight in Thai education at all levels - from early childhood to higher education levels. The numerous Royally-Initiated Projects reflect Her Royal Highness’ profound wisdom, care, concern and compassion for the people of Thailand and other countries. Her Royal Highness is indeed preoccupied with the wellbeing of the disabled, the disadvantaged and the socially marginalized. Her main aim is to provide them all with access to education, enabling them to attain knowledge and experience essential for their livelihood. They will thus be able to enjoy desirable quality of life with human dignity.

In studying the Royally-Initiated Projects in detail, one could discern that they do not concern only the single dimension of education, but embrace other essential aspects and features of the people’s lives, i.e., science, environment, culture, etc. These projects are therefore intrinsically well integrated.



It is also interesting to note that the projects largely depend on the goodwill and ready cooperation of several segments of the society, including members of the communities and academic institutions. The principle of **All for Education** is therefore clearly illustrated in Her Royal Highness' initiatives.

The Office of the Education Council (OEC) deems it appropriate to disseminate the valuable information on the wisdom and compassion of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn to the widest circle. The OEC therefore wishes to express its profound gratitude to Her Royal Highness for authorizing OEC to publish the Royal Address and to use valuable photographs and other relevant materials for illustration.

*Amrung Chantavanich*

Amrung Chantavanich, Ph.D.  
Secretary-General,  
The Office of the Education Council  
July, 2006



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I will try to finish my talk on time, because at 9.45 I will have to give the floor to the Minister of Education. First of all, I would like to thank our American friends for coming. Welcome to Thailand once again. I hope that you will have a productive and enjoyable time in our country. If there is anything you would like to do, see or eat, do not hesitate to tell my Thai colleagues who accompany you. I am sure that they are all pleased to have you here and wish you a happy, enjoyable and interesting stay.

I consider myself a representative of Thai education, because I am entirely a product of the Thai education system. It took me 16 years in grade school and undergraduate school, and more time afterwards in the graduate schools of three Thai universities. So, as you hear my presentation, you can be sure that my style is totally a reflection of Thai mentality.

## **From US Visits to US-Thailand Education Roundtables**

During my visits to the US, I have many opportunities to visit various places of interest, including the University of Pennsylvania, and gain a lot of information, knowledge and experience. Of course I have learned a lot more from my American friends and those who were educated in American universities. I think what I got is useful for my life and also my work. For example, in 1997 I had an opportunity to visit the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and listened to the briefing of many projects and activities of the school.

One project involved cooperation of the Graduate School of Education with many countries, especially in science and technology education. It includes teacher exchange among universities and schools in the US and in other countries. At that time I thought it might be possible to have such a program with Thai school teachers as well. So I talked to the Dean, Vice Dean Cheng Davis and the people about selecting a few teachers and school administrators to go to the US to observe the way the American teachers conducted their science and technology courses in their schools, and also to have a chance to stay in those teachers' homes. This project seemed to be quite successful, and it has been expanded to cover many other schools.

After that, we had the first roundtable, and so the roundtable is the product of this project. I have to say that I am honored to be asked to be the Honorary Chairperson of the Steering Committee on the Thailand-US Education Roundtables, that

have been focusing on policy research in the areas of *Science and Technology Education* and *Higher Education* ever since.

### **My Career in Higher Education**

In higher education, I have been working for almost 25 years in the military academy. It will be my 25<sup>th</sup> year next year. I think the strength of this academy is its various disciplines of engineering. We offer courses in basic science, like physics, chemistry, and some biology. Now we have environmental science and biotechnology courses. I myself began to serve in the Department of Law and Social Sciences, and later in the Department of History. I also coordinate for the academy to establish scientific and technological cooperation with other universities and research institutes both in Thailand and abroad. We often have lecturers from various countries, including the US. The present ambassador, while serving his former post, also honored us by giving one lecture.

### **Education Development in the Remote Areas and Role of Higher Education**

Apart from my job at the military academy, I would say that I am more familiar with education development at the level of Grade 1-12 and some vocational education. Most schools I have been working with are not in big cities. My observation is that if you want to be successful in a tough job like that, you need a lot of professional help from higher education institutions and a lot of research to support the development of teachers' knowledge and teaching techniques to transfer



knowledge to their students, besides helping them with food and nutrition, which is also a fundamental role of education.

Here, I started by introducing agriculture to them to grow plants and vegetables and to raise edible animals and fish to secure students' food source. Agricultural practice in the schools has provided a more affordable food source, and we can also train skills in agriculture to the children. They have to make observations and keep records as part of their lessons, not just for their agriculture subject, but also for science and mathematics classes as well. We do that by making all of those activities their science projects. They have to work in teams and in a democratic way. We have tried to make sure that they have to have some sort of meeting, and everybody has a chance to express his/her view. The conclusion drawn from all views are implemented. Nobody can be a dictator in those schools. Later on other parties like teachers, parents, students, members of the local administration and villagers also form committees when they work together.

We should know how to deal with and manage water supply in those schools as well as in the nearby communities, because in some schools there are boarding students from far away communities. We need water for agriculture. So if we get the water supply for the schools without sharing it with the communities, that can cause problems. So, we have to provide enough resources for everybody in the areas.

We have to depend on good research to know the right things to do and the right technologies to use, for example, knowledge about soil condition, decision about what crops

to grow, etc. We should know good agricultural practice in the first place. We also need good workers in many fields, for example, public health, laboratory work, etc. In this case, universities can help a lot.

One good example is that in some areas there is a lot of malaria epidemic. It is a problem that we have to solve. There has been a big project that non-profit organizations from the US, the Ministry of Public Health and the universities work together in educating the villagers about how to do the blood testing and to give some treatment. In my project, I was aware of that problem, because when I visited some schools, people laid down greeting me, instead of sitting down or standing up. That was not good. If they were not healthy, the schools could not go on, because the teachers could not teach, and the students could not study.

When we tried to get some microscopes, we could get the ones that were discarded by universities or hospitals. When we fixed them a little, they were usually good enough for testing blood samples. It worked quite well this way. The universities helped in campaigning to raise the awareness of the problem. Not just the schools of health sciences and medicine, but the schools of social sciences could also help in this program. This also became a topic for science projects of the primary school students, who interviewed people and came up with various ideas about the disease to present to their classes.

We have the immunization program, especially the polio vaccination project, which works quite well in schools. In dealing with the problem of malnutrition, even when you

have a good nutrition project for the schools, the children may still be quite thin because of the problem of parasites. Once we discovered in one student 4-5 species of worm in his stomach. So, we had to invite them out in one or more ways. This is the work of universities.

There are more projects in schools, like dental hygiene, arts, crafts and some technologies. Again universities help in those projects. We have to do research and development to improve finished products. We also do quality control with some help from technical colleges and universities. Apart from that, we sell our school products. This needs a lot of marketing techniques, and we do it professionally with the help from some universities. These are just some examples.

### **Science Education in Rural Schools**

In the rural schools, we have promoted a lot of science projects that I have already mentioned. We have a project to promote the study of biodiversity in schools, by helping them set up school botanical gardens and school herbaria. In this project, children are taught to collect plants, both living and dried ones, to know the correct ways of preserving herbal and plant specimens. The same project also promotes arts, like painting and sketching of plants and plants' parts. Students seem quite interested in this project.

We have tried to build some laboratories in the schools, but we try not to have too sophisticated laboratory equipments due to some constraints of those schools. Sometimes they are just adequate to get work done. Sometimes some innovative

teachers design their own equipments to substitute the expensive equipments. For example, one teacher uses the nearby small waterfalls to shake the flasks instead of buying an expensive flask shaker for tissue culture experiments. There are a lot of innovative ideas in the school projects. One example of the products is the banana plants, that have been distributed to the people in the community as a result of the tissue culture work in a remote school of a Northern province. In this case, the school is able to serve the whole community.

Not only Thai professors have helped me, I have also been advised by many American professors. Since I studied in the Thai schools, I was taught mostly by the Thai teachers, but at one time I was a trainee in a GIS course at the AIT (Asian Institute of Technology). At the AIT there were a lot of American instructors. That was the first time I attended courses taught in English.

## **Early Childhood Education**

In the field of education and community development, I started my work mainly on primary and early childhood education. Later on I set up some day-care centers because it is too tough for me to run around catching those kids from the villages to be de-wormed and immunized. So, when they get together in the day-care centers or in the kindergartens, it makes the job easier for me.

## Health Education and Cooperation with American Professors

An American professor whom I look forward to meeting this Friday suggested that I should focus also in promoting the health of pregnant women, nursing mothers, newborn babies (0-3 years). Apart from that I also had to do health education for the upper primary students.

We have been quite successful in the promotion of health at the primary level (nutrition and immunization). The extent of my work for other categories of the target population enables me to have a more effective result. There is much less problem about protein and energy malnutrition now, but we still have to focus on deficiency of vitamins and micronutrients, including some mineral elements, for example, iodine deficiency.

The American professor also advised me to meet the experts in the same field in the countries I have visited. For example, last year when I went to the US and attended some lectures on nutrition, I said, “In a couple of days after I return home, I will go to Iran”. The American professor could contact the Iranian experts to meet me in Tehran. So, I have an opportunity to exchange views about nutrition with them. Experts have their professional networks. There are global networks of all disciplines, facilitating me to learn more in each trip abroad.

Once I had an opportunity to accompany a delegation of the School of Public Health of an American university to a

country in South Asia. We did house visit. If we heard the news about a newborn baby in a household, we would rush to that house to see how much the baby weighed and how it was in relation to the condition of the mother. I helped them do some interviews, of course with an interpreter, and we did the whole house survey. Later, this group of experts came to visit Thailand, and I acted as their tour guide sometimes. Some of the places they went you will also visit after this meeting. The delegation donated to my project to build the extension classrooms of the schools in the rural areas, in addition to their own province schools. They are like the campuses of the schools.

One school I have recently visited has 14 campuses. When the school principal has to visit a campus, he has to walk nearly 2 hours or more. He has to do a lot of walking. It is quite worthwhile because those people have no opportunity at all to meet the teachers, to study, and to have opportunities like others. So the extension service of the school is worth it. After we sent the progress report to the donors, they were very pleased, and we got some more help in other projects.

### **Community Learning Centers**

We have also helped build a lot of community learning centers. These are not exactly schools, because the number of pupils is too small, and the access is too difficult for regular teachers to stay. So, we used this fund to build a small simple school, and hired 1 or 2 teachers there. Those teachers must be able to speak their local languages and to teach from

kindergarten to older children, including the grownups in the evening. They have to help the students in agriculture, cooking, and everything. It is very cost-effective.

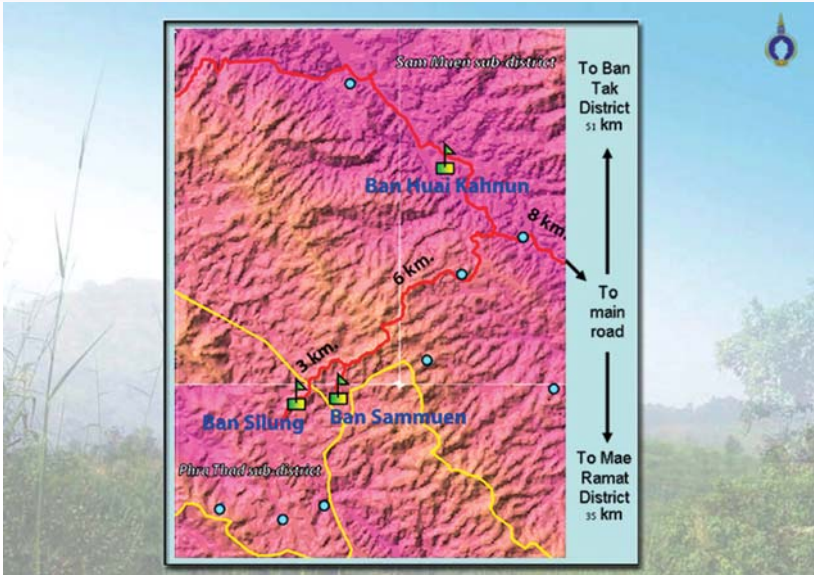
## **Thailand-US Education Cooperation**

I am glad that starting with the Thai teacher training project at the University of Pennsylvania, we have extended our cooperation to the discussions of many interesting topics in the Thailand-US education roundtables. For example, the topic on financing and budgeting in higher education is very important. We are not so poor as if we had nothing at all. In fact we have some money, but we should use our money in the most effective way, and how to do this is very important.

My grandfather and my father had cooperated with the US foundations. It is not our duty to work on government to government cooperation but we can do a lot by working with non-profit organizations and the civil society of the US. This has proven that the people in the US are our very good friends. I am very happy to play a small part in this Thailand-US academic cooperation.

## A Slide Show

To end my presentation, let me show you some photographs.



- This shows the three villages (*Ban Huai Kahnun*, *Ban Si Lung*, *Ban Sam Muen*) in a town (*Mae Ramat District*) in *Tak Province*. In one of the GIS school mappings, we found that there were no educational services available in this area. So we asked all people from various agencies to help out by dividing the work for each agency. One part was done by the Border Patrol Police Office, one by the Non Formal Education Office, and another by the General Education Agency (now part of the Office of the Basic Education Commission), under the Ministry of Education. We wrote the projects to get some funding from various sources in Thailand and abroad. Many overseas friends, including my American friends, helped us a lot in these projects. So, I would like to show you this



map. On the map the two areas may seem close to each other, for example, only 3 kilometers away. It does not seem like a big deal in the city, but if you have to walk across the mountains and sometimes along the muddy trails in the rainy season, just like skiing up the mountain, but instead of snow, it is mud, then it is not as near as it looks. I have tried walking in this area, and so got to know it well. This is the place where we have some information, for example, their per capita income is about US\$100 per year.



*Ban Si Lung*



*Ban Sam Muen*

- These are the pictures in a similar area, not very far away from the one before.



*Ban Huai Kahnun*



## Doi tung Project

- This is the Doi Tung Project which you will visit. The people who came to live here, are some sort of illegal migrants. The project is in the place where my grandmother used to live.



There are many projects going on, like handicrafts, macadamia nut factory, coffee plantation, and food processing. Of course, university people come to help in work like quality control and maintenance of old machines and equipments. We also have the Ministry of Education help in our school network. There are several schools in this area, and they are under different umbrellas of central administration. We also have to do some demographic study like population estimation and projection. We have discovered that some schools are attended by people

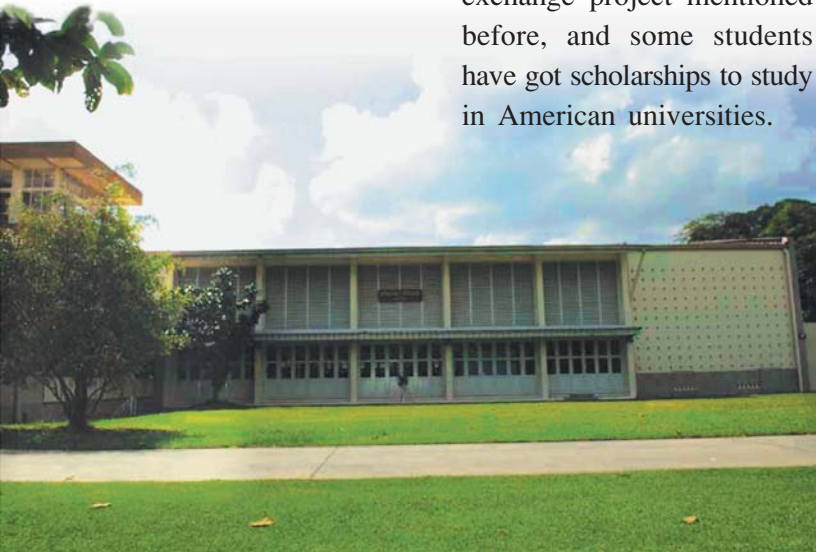
from the nearby countries, not only from Thailand. One of these schools has only 20% Thai students, and 80% from abroad. Nevertheless, we make sure that they can have access up to higher education.



- This is the outcome of the tissue culture lab. People who come to work here are mostly girls who were unemployed in the past.



- This is the school where I studied from kindergarten up to Grade 12. My father founded this school and now I look after the school. This school also took part in the administrator/teacher exchange project mentioned before, and some students have got scholarships to study in American universities.





- This is a project in Nan. It has a Community Learning Center that I talked about previously.



- This is one of the districts in Chiang Mai, where there are a lot of community learning centers, funded mainly by many companies in France.





- This is how we develop a community learning center project. It is a package that we send to people who are interested in building them. We have the so-called “school house” which was built by the villagers. When we visit and see that this place needs a school, we send people who can speak the local language to announce that we are going to build a school.



If the people agree that this is a good idea, they should help building it. They all come because they would like their children to study. They themselves also come to study there. We even have the elderly come to study. Both men and women participate equally. We provide each place a set of educational equipments/tools, a solar cell and some facilities for distance learning.





- This is a school run by the border patrol policemen. They will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. Before that, in the border areas there was no chance for the people to get any education. So, the border patrol policemen used whatever knowledge they had to teach the people under the severe condition, like no electricity.





Sometimes the teachers were only police privates. Their bosses realized that it was an important thing to do, and so they gave the support. They also told my parents and my grandmother to support the project and to get some money from donations. I myself have done mostly the work in nutrition and how to further their education. Some of the students in these schools got master's degrees, but no one gets a Ph.D. yet.



- These are the arts and crafts that we support the teachers from the communities to teach their students. They also learn the way to use certain plants as natural dyes for their cotton thread. It is the techniques they learned from their parents. This is one part of their science projects. Then, we help them sell all these things.

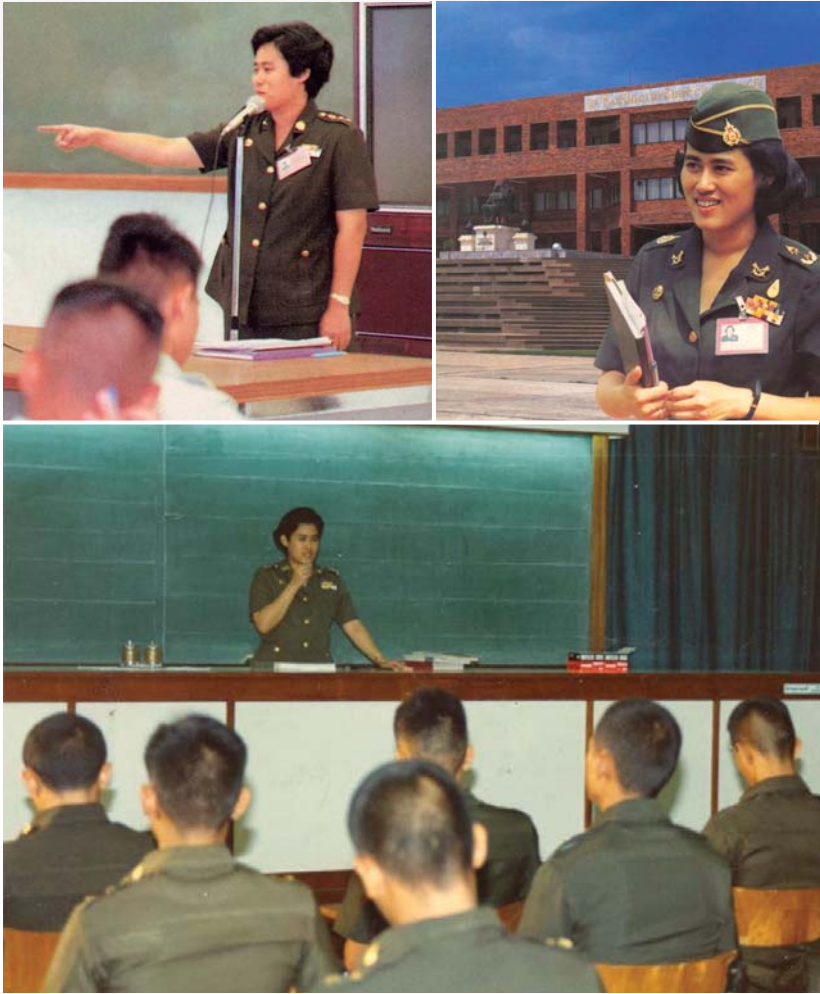




- This is a day-care center that I started some years ago in Narathiwat Province, in the southern most part of the country. Many years ago, I had a picture of the children and myself taken.



After that I tried to search for them to see how well they have been doing. Some months ago during my visit to the center again, the village community surprised me by having them there to greet me. Now the same children in the picture are all grown up. Some are nurses. Some are technical people. I took the first picture from the one they hang on the wall. These are all the people that the village community was able to keep track of.



## Teaching in Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy

- This is my class in the military academy. From time to time I invite people from outside to give lecture.



We invite people from the US Embassy several times, especially during the election. We had an opportunity to learn from some American professors through the VDO conference. We have some laboratories that students can work in. Now we have some special projects supervised by many highly qualified faculty members who got their Ph.D.s mostly in engineering and were mostly trained overseas.





- This is the project that helps some children who because of poverty cannot attend regular schools, and their parents send them to be novices in the temples. This is one of the novice

schools. We have many in the country that is under the Office of Buddhism. We can get some donation to help them. One novice spoke up and asked me “*Yome Mae* (Mother), can you get some computers for us?” So I managed to get them some computers. In fact, I should not be his mother, but I should be his grandmother.



- This is the language lab. It is used for Thai, English and Pali languages, the kind that has Buddhist teachings. They use this sound lab, and the lessons should be more interesting. They may use computers as well in their teaching and learning.



- This is the girl with no limbs at all. She has only shoulders and hips, but no legs and no hands. She would like to be a computer expert, and she is quite good in languages. She wants to be two things, a DJ and a computer expert. She sings very well. She manages with the help of an electric wheelchair. She can go anywhere.



We have tried to provide some appropriate equipments for her. This is why I have to shop around and see some research in the US universities to learn how to help people with disabilities. One good way is to use voice recognition or voice command, but it is very difficult in the Thai language. So, now I am training her to be more proficient in English. This is not easy because she stays in a very sensitive area. So, it is very difficult to find a teacher to go there. She can only use those computer facilities.



- This is the boy whom I have been helping. It is quite difficult because this boy wants to be a soldier. He is lucky because he has his parents supporting him. The previous girl has only her mother. This is the equipment that we somewhat copied from the expensive one we saw abroad. It is expensive to make a plastic mould. So we tried to use ceramics which can be made easily in Thailand. In this way he can be independent in eating. No one has to spoon feed him any more. He can use this spoon to transfer food to the right spot from where he can then take it in.

Now we have found another girl with no limbs. She is an orphan. Her parents came from the North, and they did not have enough money to take care of her. So, she was left in an orphanage. We have tried to help her.

That is about all I have time to say. Next is the Minister's time. I took this last picture yesterday. They were all sleeping, and we just had to wake them up.

Thank you very much.



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