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Deutsche Welle - AMIC
Seminar on
RADIO PROGRAMMING
IN A MULTIMEDIA AGE

COUNTRY PAPER – THAILAND

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on

“Radio Programming in a Multimedia Age”

May 10-15, 1999

Valeerat Sakornpant
National Broadcasting of Thailand

There are currently more than 500 radio frequencies shared by government agencies in Thailand. The Government Public Relations Department ranks first controlling the highest number of frequencies, followed by Royal Thai Army and the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand.

The Public Relations Department presently operates 60 AM radio stations and 85 FM stations situated in all parts of the country. Of the number, 12 stations are Bangkok-based, 6 AM stations and 6 FM station, two of which transmitting English programmes. Radio Thailand also operates its World Service in 12 languages, Thai, Khmer, Vietnamese, Burmese, Japanese, Mandarin, Malaysia, Indonesia, English, French and German.

The transmission has since July 1994 been carried over the RTH-VOA Relay Station in Udon Thani Province in the Northeast, in accordance with the country-to-country agreement between Thailand and the United States of America. The programmes are transmitted to the relay station via satellite. The relay station features eleven short-wave transmitters, each with 500 kilowatts output, operated simultaneously, with highly directional, high gain, and electronically slewable curtain antennas. The target area includes over 40 percent of the world's population, including the United States of America for Radio Thailand.

Radio Thailand, Domestic Service and World Service, serves as the parent station for official newscasts and live coverages of major national events, in Thai and English, for radio stations in the country, both affiliates and others.

The fast pace of modern technologies has transformed radio broadcast with the emergence of phone-in, participatory programmes and ever-increasing use of computer technology in the broadcasts including the creation of media websites.

On radio phone-in programmes now dominate the dial with unique communities created such as traffic reporters, emergency response network and others.
The ownership of radio has not changed, remaining firmly in the hands of government agencies and state enterprises. Among these agencies, only the Public Relations Department and the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand are mandated to operate public broadcasting services.
Radio Broadcasting Services Under the Army Control in Thailand

Radio broadcasting services under the control of the Royal Thai Army began at its Signal Department in 1955 with the transmission output of 10 kilohertz. The first army radio station was called "Local Radio Station". Its objectives were to inform people about the visits of their Majesties the King and Queen to various areas of the country, enhance public relations work and psychological operations for military units and local people and train army personnel to effectively use communication tools. Apart from the security reasons, the establishment of the first army radio station was also meant to seek welfare benefits for army personnel and develop army units.

The army's "Local Radio Station" gained popularity among government officials and business people after it had broadcast for a certain period. It received donations from business people in those days for use to buy new radio equipment. The Royal Thai Army subsequently established many more stations. There are currently 128 radio stations under the control of 25 units in the army. Because of the great number of radio stations, the Royal Thai Army has formed a governing board to manage the broadcasting services for the maximum benefit to the army and the people, in accordance with laws as well as rules and regulations governing radio broadcasting. The Army Broadcasting Directing Board is chaired by the Army Commander-in-Chief.

The Royal Thai Army has set as its broadcasting policy of 1999 for all units handling army radio stations to follow. The policy is to promote public awareness of democratic administration among soldiers and the people. It calls for the use of electronic media to enhance the army operations for national security and promote better understanding among organizations, institutions and groups of people. The policy is also to disseminate news and information, raise public awareness of national unity and Thai art and culture and support the projects and activities carried out by Government and the army.
The Royal Thai Army has also established specific policy for its radio broadcasting management. Under the policy, army radio stations must produce programmes by themselves, focusing on national security at various levels, and with the aim of promoting proper knowledge and understanding about economic development, environmental protection, cultural conservation and military development. It will help in the anti-drug campaign among the people and in military units. To produce radio programmes, army radio stations are required to act in accordance with the regulations of the Government Public Relations Department and the Royal Thai Army and must be politically neutral. The programme production and news presentation must not cause damage to other people. The programmes, in particular, are suggested to avoid political criticism. This is not to block the freedom of expression but to prevent misunderstanding between the military and political institutions.

Article 40 of the 1997 Thai Constitution requires the re-distribution of broadcast frequencies and the Royal Thai Army, like all other government agencies operating radio broadcasting services, must comply with the Constitution. However, the Royal Thai Army has stressed that it needs to possess radio stations, reasoning that the army is government agency responsible for protecting national sovereignty and stability. Therefore, the army must have its own radio and television stations with enough frequencies to cover the entire country for national security and development in various areas. The development areas cited by the army include economic, political, psychological and military affairs.
The Mass Communication Organization of Thailand Radio Station

The Mass Communication Organization of Thailand (MCOT) was established in 1977 as a state enterprise under the Prime Minister’s Office. The main objective is to conduct the mass communication business both locally and internationally and other related businesses that contribute to the development of the country’s mass communication. It has structured itself into three organizations: Television Channel 9 supervising TV broadcasting, the MCOT Radio Station in charge of radio broadcasting and the Thai News Agency.

Concerning radio broadcasting services, the MCOT Radio Station operates 2 AM frequencies and 7 FM frequencies covering Bangkok and its outskirts. In the regional areas of the country, the MCOT Radio Station now runs 52 FM stations. The situation concerning broadcasting industry in Thailand is about to change in line with the present Thai Constitution which was promulgated on October 11, 1997. Legislative process towards the change can take years before the reshaping of the industry can be seen.

According to Article 40 of the 1997 Thai Constitution, frequencies used for radio, television broadcasts and telecommunications are considered communications resources in the public domain. Under this article, an independent public organization must be set up to assign bands and regulate and supervise involvement with radio, television and telecommunications. The operation must be in line with the best interest of the people at both national and local levels and for educational, cultural and national security purposes, and with the spirit of free enterprise. The article needs more clarification, so it is doubted where members of the independent public organization responsible for fair distribution of broadcast frequencies come from and how to ensure that the organization is free from political and business influences. The article does not mention about investment while frequencies are of great value. After broadcast frequencies have been re-distributed in line with the Constitution, a follow-up study must be conducted and an inspection must be made to ensure that the
frequencies will cover the entire country, so that people will have wider access to new and information.

The monopolistic system is also one the topics to been concerned about. For example, a company may be formed to invest in operating radio broadcasting services in a community. One day the company may sell all its shares to a sloe individual, thus resulting in monopolization. To prevent the monopolistic operation, there must be some laws to govern the issue. For the preparation of the MCOT for the restructuring of its broadcasting services in line with Article 40 of the Constitution, the MCOT has operated following the trends mentioned in the Constitution for more than 10 years now. For example, all the nine MCOT frequencies in Bangkok and its outskirts have been classified according to the target audiences. In the regional areas of the country, the MCOT has already started its mass radio broadcasting services for local listeners who are encouraged to phone in to express their opinions. At the initial stage, it was quite difficult because normally Thai people are too shy to express their opinions. Some tricks have been used to encourage listeners to phone in to request songs in a programme. The programme producer then asked their names and occupations, so that they could tell about themselves and gradually expressed their opinions about their own community through the radio programme.

The MCOT radio stations in Bangkok and the provinces have operated quite efficiently in response to the government policy as well as the Constitution. Radio broadcasting services in Thailand have so far adapted to the changing situation when compared to four or five years ago.

The MCOT would continue to implement its original plans even when an independent public organization is set up to take charge of re-distributing broadcast frequencies.
The Impacts of the Economic Crisis on the Thai Media

Economic Crisis in Thailand

The unprecedented economic crisis that broke out in Thailand in the middle of 1997 has seriously affected the country in many ways, for example, the rising unemployment rate, the collapse of businesses and grave social problems. To solve those problems, several solutions have been proposed and adopted. One of them is for Thailand to commit itself to the capitalist world with the help of the IMF and other sources of financial assistance, placing emphasis on free competition, the creation of confidence among investors, social investment and financial institution restructuring. However, some conflicts have seen in adopting this solution. For example, at the beginning of the crisis, the Government adopted a cautious fiscal policy and both public and private sectors were urged to cut their costs. Although the policy has improved the country's economic stability, it has caused liquidity crunch and decelerated business operation. Later, the Government has issued many measures to spur the economy by stimulating spending in various sectors. A major criticism over this solution is that it takes into account the rich rather than the poor. The second solution comprises three alternatives. One is that Thailand remains in the globalization wave while building up its community economy based on self-sufficiency. The second alternative calls for social reform based on civil society, while the third one calls on the people to establish their own strategy based on Buddhist principles and community culture to overcome the economic war.

Thailand has plunged into crisis for almost two years now and signs of improvement have been seen in the country's international reserves, the stability of the baht and low inflation. Economic experts have accepted that the grave problems accumulated from the times of the bubble economy could not be brought under control within a short period. Some people keep asking when the economy will pick up and criticizing the Government's measures and economic policy management, while the Government stressed that it has been on the right track to economic
recovery. The economic crisis is pushing the country to the cross-roads. This situation is considered as a turning point in Thailand’s modern history.

**News and Information Trends Before And After the Crisis**

Before the economic crisis, news and information about Thailand’s situation and outlook could be divided into two sides, according to a survey conducted by a team of academics supported by the Thailand Research Fund. One side supported the idea of globalization and agreed that Thailand should get prepared to take part in the globalized production, trade and financial systems. The organizations in favour of this idea were, for example, the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Research Institute. The other side supported the idea of folk wisdom and agreed with the move to boost community strength. Among those in favour of this idea are non-governmental organizations dealing with rural development.

Following the economic crisis, those who support the concept of globalization have slowed down their publicity on the idea and see the need to improve their analysis and predictions, while those subscribing to the idea of folk wisdom have moved to intensify their campaign, especially for that concerning self-reliant community. The Thai media have also reflected two different ideas on the country’s economic solutions. One supports the trend for Thailand to comply with the IMF. The other shows opposition to the economic solutions under the IMF guidelines. It has been found that news and information about Thailand’s situation and prospects in general seem to be in the style of creating a social movement rather than taking an objective look at various issues.

A new idea has come up that serious action on the warning system should be taken in various sectors of Thai society, involving finance, industry, trade, politics, administration and the mass media. The media, in particular, have been urged to play a greater role in giving an early warning for the country, help pull the country out of the economic downfall and encourage the people to have courage to fight difficulties.
Impacts of the Economic Crisis on the Thai Media

Taking a close look at the media in Thailand’s case, it has been found that the media, be they print or electronic, have suffered grave economic problems caused by the emergence of the financial and economic crisis. A large number of media people have been laid off because of cutbacks or the suspension or closure of newspapers and magazines. Salary cuts have been chosen if not lay-offs. Among all forms of the media, newspapers and magazines are found to have suffered most as a result of the economic downturn.

A survey conducted by Media Data Resources Co., Ltd. shows that following the crisis, the number of nationwide newspapers in Thailand dropped from 44 to 34 and magazines from 237 to 216 during 1997-1998. Among the newspapers, Thai-language ones dropped to 25 from 34, while English newspaper were reduced to 3 from 4 during the same period. There were six Chinese newspapers in Thailand in 1998, the same as the previous year. The number of television and radio station operators was unchanged during 1997-1998. Total media industry spending fell to 38 billion baht in 1998 from 41.6 billion baht in 1997.

Privately-owned media seem to suffer more than government agencies and state enterprises handling media services. Numerous radio programmes went off the air, while several concessionaires canceled their contracts, due to their inability to pay for the concessioned air-time. Government agencies and state enterprises which own broadcasting stations could find them a financial burden rather than an asset.

Looking at the Government Public Relations Department, which supervises the Government’s media policy and operates Radio Thailand and Television of Thailand, it has been faced with massive regular budget cuts like other government agencies. The economic crisis compelled the Department to temporarily close its four information offices in London, Washington D.C., Kuala Lumpur and Riyadh in March 1998. This was in line with the government policy to cut back expenses for overseas offices reducing the number of staff, introducing a merger plan and even closing
The Department's staff dealing with news as well as radio and television programmes have faced a cut by half in their overtime payment. Fortunately, their salaries have not been affected.

The National News Bureau under the Department have reduced paper use by half for its daily bulletins to be sent to various organizations free of charge. However, members of the National News Bureau's bulletins have been suggested to get such a bulletin on the Department's homepage through the internet instead. The National News Bureau has faced a cut in its budget allocation in the 1999 fiscal year by 30 percent, resulting in it scrapping several projects to send its reporters abroad for news coverage.

To save energy costs, Radio Thailand, Home Service, has cut its air time by one hour daily from 19 to 18 hours. For Radio Thailand, World Service, allowances for news translators and announcers who are not government officials have been trimmed in stages, by 50 percent so far. Radio Thailand, World Service, is aimed at informing Thais abroad, friends of Thailand the world over, and foreign residents and tourists in the country developments on all fronts in Thailand. It now broadcasts to various parts of the world in 12 languages, namely Thai, English, French, German, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, Burmese, Malaysian, Indonesian, Japanese and Mandarin on short wave via satellite. Newscasts in English are heard on FM 95.5 and FM 105 Megahertz as well. Despite cutbacks, the 12 languages broadcasting on the World Service still continue their services with unchanged air-time so far. The Television of Thailand, which operates TV Channel 11, has also cut its air-time by three hours and a half during weekdays from 19 hours to 16 hours and a half, and half an hour during weekend from 19 hours to 18 hours and a half. In case of necessity and more air-time is required such as live broadcasts as requested by other government agencies, permission must by sought from the Director-General of the Government Public Relations Department.
Media Management in Times of Crisis and Future Trends

The economic crisis should not be viewed negatively by the media. In fact, it should be turned into an opportunity to rectify past mistakes and develop wisdom to cope with all problems. This will prove how media practitioners can work for great flexibility and efficiency with a limited budget.

The economic crisis in Thailand broke out during the time when Thailand introduced the 1997 Constitution which will bring about tremendous effects on media operation in any forms. Articles 39, 40 and 41 of the 1997 Constitution guarantee the right of liberty of expression, writing, printing, publicity and communications by other means, prohibit censorship in the media and limit the role of the state in media operation. Frequencies used for radio, television broadcasts and telecommunications are considered communications resources in the public domain. An independent public organization must be set up to allocate and manage frequencies for broadcasting and telecommunications and supervise their operations. Rights and liberties of media personnel in media organizations are guaranteed. However, legislative process can take years before the restructuring of media services in accordance with the 1997 Constitution can be completed.

Meanwhile, the economic crisis has necessitated abrupt changes. Considering that the Government’s overall public relations work lacked clear direction and targets to tackle the national crisis, the National Public Relations Commission, with the Government Public Relations Department as Secretariat, in March 1999 came up with guidelines to launch a campaign for the building up quality in Thai society. The guidelines are considered as a national agenda for public relations. The idea behind the national agenda is to bring about changes to the better in the people’s behaviour and attitude as well as social values. Apart from the globalization effects and the mismanagement in economic policy, the current crisis is seen to have also resulted from wrong social values, attitudes and behaviour of the people themselves. For example, they have competed for income stability rather than good deeds. The
concept of “quality” has a broad context involving not only the change in attitude and
behaviour, but also the building up of good consciousness, morality and virtue to
solve Thailand’s problems. All government agencies and private organizations are
urged to adopt the guidelines for national-level public relations with emphasis on
quality promotion. Government media are set to play an important role in launching
this campaign to fight the crisis.

During these times of crisis, media organizations and practitioners should
reassess themselves, so that they can effectively handle changes with the new vision
of developing themselves in the public interest and in the new environment. The
adjustment has to be initiated and carried out through personnel in the organizations
involved. The Government Public Relations Department is the process of drawing up
a plan to enhance its efficiency, which will lead to reorganization. The plan is in line
with the Government’s bureaucratic reform policy to downsize bureaucracy. The
current crisis has an impact on the Department’s reengineering process and its
ambitious plan to train and retrain personnel at all levels. It is certain that in the
future, media organizations in the form of corporations will be in operation from news
gathering to disseminating. The Government Public Relations Department will have
to adapt its role to become a regulatory body in terms of public information, foreign
relations and national security.
Broadcast At A Turning Point

According to Thailand's new constitution promulgated on October, 1997, most pertinent to the media are sections 39-41 with the following contents:

Article 39: People have the right of liberty to expression, speech, writing, printing, publicity and communications by other means.

The restriction of any freedom and liberty guaranteed by paragraph 1 is unconstitutional except when imposed under the authority of a law specifically enacted for the purpose of preserving national security, protecting rights, liberties, honor, family rights, or the privacy of others, for the maintenance of public morals, for protecting or stemming from the deterioration of the moral or physical well-being of the public.

It is prohibited for the government to order a shutdown of the press, of a radio station or of a television station with a view to undermining such freedom.

Official censorship of news or articles prior to their publication in newspapers, publications, on radio or television is prohibited except during the time of war or fighting but only through laws in accordance with paragraph 2.

Owners of newspapers or other media must be Thai as stipulated by law.

The State is not allowed to provide financial or other property to support privately-owned newspapers and other media.

Article 40: The frequency bands used for radio, television broadcasts and telecommunications are communication resources in the public domain.

An Independent public organization must be set up to assign bands as contemplated by paragraph 1, and regulate and supervise involvement with radio, television and telecommunications as provided by the law.

The operation of paragraph 2 must be in line with the best interest of the people at both national and local levels and for educational cultural and national security purposes, and with the spirit of free enterprise.
Also, Article 41 adds that employees of private media involved in newspapers, radio and television have the rights and liberties in accordance with the Constitution and must not be ideologically controlled by the State or the owners of the media. This also applies to employees of state-owned media.

It is preposterous to assume that the Constitution 1997 will bring about abrupt changes to media operations in any forms, broadcasting included, although all government agencies are reviewing related laws and activities undertaken under their supervision. Legislative process can take years, before restructuring of the broadcasting services in accordance with the new Constitution can be completed.

Meanwhile, the unprecedented financial crisis which surfaced on July 2, 1997, has necessitated rationalization on all fronts, with foreseeable lasting impacts on the electronic media as a whole.

In the past year, numerous radio programmes went off the air, while several concessionaires canceled their contracts, due to their inability to pay for the concession air-time. Government agencies and state enterprises which own broadcasting stations could find them a financial burden rather than as asset. Regular spending budget faces several cutbacks as well.

Obligation imposed by the Constitution, coupled with economic necessities, can result in a whole new era for electronic media in Thailand. The ownership of radio and television stations and transmitters will change hands, from government agencies and state enterprises to the public at large. In time, media organizations in the form of corporations can be expected. This can be realized even faster than anticipated. Such organizations, even though incorporated and operated on a commercial basis, can still perform their duties in public broadcasting, serving the public as their audiences and customers.

On the other hand, certain functions remain in the government sector. Services that cannot be commercialized such as broadcasting for audiences beyond the national
borders, educational broadcast, and pure public service broadcasts such as disaster preparedness, for instance, have to be defined and legislated accordingly.
The Government Public Relations Department’s Direction for Radio Broadcasting Development

Article 40 of the present Thai Constitution stipulates that all frequencies used for radio, television broadcasts and telecommunications are communications resources in the public domain. An independent public organization must be established to distribute the frequencies in line with the best interest of the people at both national and local levels, and for educational, cultural and national security purposed, and with the spirit of free enterprise. Adjustments have been made to the current 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan, 1997 to 2001. A plan has also been drawn up to develop mass media, information technology and telecommunications. It is set to be implemented from 1999 to 2008 in accordance with the national economic and social development plan.

The 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan clearly states that media freedom and free media development will be promoted, while various groups of people are to be provided with opportunities to have access to government media. The human-centred development plan is in line with several articles of the present Constitution. In response to the Constitution and the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan, the Public Relations Development, as the state public relations agency and the parent organization of the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand, has formed a committee to draw up the Masterplan for the Development of the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand, 1999 to 2001.

The Masterplan provides guidelines for the Government Public Relations Department, which operates Radio Thailand, to respond with more efficiency to human and social development guidelines as stated in the 8th Plan and in consistent with the Constitution. It is divided into two areas: national radio broadcasting and local radio broadcasting. Radio Thailand handles public broadcasting services based on public interest, therefore it differs from commercial broadcasting stations.
On national radio broadcasting development, Radio Thailand aims to develop its networks to cover a wider target audience. The programme format will be improved for better quality, while radio practitioners will be equipped with more knowledge, capabilities and experiences to achieve professionalism with ethical conduct and sense of responsibility. The management system of national broadcasting will be independent, efficient and unified on a full-cycle basis. Media users will be encouraged to participate in national radio broadcasting at all stages, in management, programme production and comment.

To achieve these aims, four national networks will be expanded to provide news, information and knowledge to the general public across the country. At the same time, the national networks must be able to link with Radio Thailand, International Services, to publicize news and information about Thailand for overseas listeners. The four national networks include the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand One (NBT.1) for public services, the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand Two (NBT.2) for education, the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand Three (NBT.3) for live broadcasts and the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand Four (NBT.4) for international public relations. More than 70 percent of the programme content will involve important issues at a national level and cover diverse fields such as economic, political, social, educational and Thai cultural affairs. These issues and fields are in line with the government policy and people’s needs, and the programme quality will be developed to be widely recognized. The target audience covering 80 percent of the country’s total population will be able to have access to various issues of national importance, which are necessary for their occupations and daily life. At the same time, at least 10 percent of the foreign population throughout the country will have access to news and information about Thailand through Radio Thailand networks.

On local radio broadcasting development, a target has been set for the Government Public Relations Department’s 76 local radio stations to operate in all
provinces nationwide for communities by 2001. The main objective is to disseminate news and information and reflect local opinions and problems in the local public interest. Local radio broadcasting services will be operated by the people in line with the offensive public relations policy for the ultimate goal of improving the people's quality of life. All the 76 local radio stations will be developed to serve as a centre for information exchange and service at the local level. The Government Public Relations Department's existing 6,942 village public relations volunteers will be trained, so that they can take part in local radio programme production, serving as reporters for local radio stations. At least 25 percent of local radio programmes will involve local news and problems and the people will be provided with opportunities to exchange views through the programmes. Over 80 percent of the local people will benefit from local radio programmes, thus contributing to their livelihood and quality of life.

With the development plan at both national and local levels, it is expected that Radio Thailand will be of maximum benefit and great efficiency, in response to the government policy of human and social development and the 1997 Thai Constitution. In addition, the people and communities will have opportunities to use Radio Thailand for local and community development based on the "media of the people by the people and for the people" principle.
National Broadcasting Services of Thailand for International Public Relations

The Government Public Relations Department, through Radio Thailand, World Service, broadcasts for overseas listeners in 12 languages and for local listeners in English. In response to the development of the national network for international public relations as stated in the Masterplan for the Development of the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand, 1999 to 2001, the Government Public Relations Department will separate broadcasting services for overseas audience from those for local listeners. It has worked out two strategic development projects, one on the International Network for Overseas Listeners and the other on the International Network for Local Listeners.

Radio Thailand Started its foreign language services in 1938, aimed at informing Thais abroad, friends of Thailand the world over, and foreign residents and tourists in the country of developments on all fronts in Thailand. Radio Thailand, World Service, now broadcasts to various parts of the world in Thai, English, French, German, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, Burmese, Malaysian, Indonesian, Japanese and Mandarin on short wave via satellite. Newscasts in English are heard on FM 95.5 and FM 105 Megahertz. Five new services have been planned, in Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Tagalog and Cantonese. Throughout its long period of operations, Radio Thailand, World Service has efficiently promoted Thailand’s image and relations with the world community at all levels.

According to the International Network for Overseas Listeners Project, Radio Thailand, World Service, will be developed into a full international radio station, with its own management and operation units and representative offices in various countries for news coverage and international coordination. The main objectives are to disseminate news and information beyond frontiers in entering into the Information Age, create networks linking with international ones in a systematic manner and
enhance the efficiency of public relations work to be widely recognized with the help of modern technologies.

Radio Thailand, World Service, under this project, will present news and information with emphasis on politics, administration, economy, social affairs, art and culture and tourism. The target audiences are foreigners and Thais residing abroad. To achieve this aim, a committee will be formed for the operation together with the establishment of the information network systems. The project will be financed by the Government and the Radio and Television Broadcasting Governing Board.

Under the International Network for Local Listeners Project, Radio Thailand, World Service, will mainly broadcast in English for domestic audience comprising tourists, businesspeople and the general public. It will later add more foreign language services. The International Network for Local Listeners aims to present news and other programmes to listeners in Bangkok and the provinces especially in major tourist cities. A parent FM radio station will be established in Bangkok and Broadcast English news and programmes according to the appropriately set schedules. The target audiences are foreigners and Thais living in Thailand. The project will expand the Government Public Relations Department's international broadcasting services more extensively and provide an opportunity for students and the general public to learn various languages from news and other programmes. Local communities will be informed of the developments of various tourist cities.

The network areas include AYUTTHAYA Province in the central region, KANCHANABURI Province in the West, PATTAYA in CHON BURI, RAYONG and TRAT Provinces in the East, NAKHON RATCHASIMA, KHON KAEN, UBON RATCHATHANI and NONG KHAI Provinces in the Northeast, CHIANG MAI, CHIANG RAI, LAMPANG, PHITSANULOK, MAE HONG SON and SAMUI Districts of SURAT THANI, HAT YAI District of SONGKHLA, NARATHIWAT, PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN, RANONG and YALA Provinces in the South. A committee will be formed and networks be established for coordination with all
related agencies. The project will financed by the Radio and Television Broadcasting Governing Board.

With both International Network for Overseas Listeners and International Network for Local Listeners, the Government Public Relations Department will serve as an information centre in conducting borderless public relations and Thai art and culture with greater efficiency.
Thailand's News and Information Direction

The unprecedented economic crisis that manifested itself in Thailand in the middle of last year has spread to the entire region and become a global crisis. Repercussions have been seen and felt at a varying degree in each region. The crisis has felt at a varying degree in each region. The crisis has encouraged Thai people to think differently and question the country's existing economic warning. A new idea has come up that serious action on the warning system should be taken in various sectors of Thai society, involving finance, industry, trade, politics, administration, academics and the mass media.

Taking a close look at the mass media, it has been found that media in Thailand, be they print or electronic media, have presented adequate news and information about the present situation in Thailand and the world and its outlook. These news and information can be used to give an overview of Thai society and its future trends. They can also serves an early warning about what trends and what issues in the world could likely affect the people's lives. Realizing the significant role of news and information, the Thailand Research Fund has supported a pilot research project on “Thailand's News and Information Direction”, known in Thai as “KHAO SAN THIT THANG PRATHET THAI”. The pilot project was conducted from July to September 1998 by prominent academic ANOOT ABHABHIROM and his team.

The project aims to analyze news and information from the perspective of both public and private sectors as well as the people's sector as appeared in various forms of the mass media. It involves such major topics as politics and administration, production and trade, science and technology, culture and lifestyle, education and public health and population and the environment. The news and information was gathered from print media, radio, television and the internet. Results of the research will be publicized and presented to policy-makers and planners.

According to a survey conducted as part of the research project, newspapers and magazines featuring news and information are accepted by the people more than
other forms of media in terms of reliability. Research centres of financial institutions are also accepted by the people for their articles on the situation and outlook of Thai society. The survey points out that news and information about Thailand’s situation and outlook are divided into two sides. One side supports the idea of globalization and agrees that Thailand should get prepared to take part in the globalization and agrees that Thailand should get prepared to take part in the globalized production, trade and finance systems. The organizations that are in favour of this idea are the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, the Bank of Thailand and the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI). An example reflecting their idea on this point is that Thailand should be developed into a financial cinder in this region. The other side supports the idea of folk wisdom and agrees with the move to strengthen communities. Among those in favour of this idea are non-governmental organizations dealing with rural development.

The survey shows that after the economic and social crisis, those who support the idea of globalization have slowed down their publicity on the idea and see the need to improve their analysis and predictions, while those subscribing to the idea of folk wisdom have moved to intensify their publicity; especially that concerning community economy. It is also found in the survey that news and information about Thailand’s situation and outlook generally appeared in various forms of mass media seems to be in the style of creating a social movement instead of taking an objective look at various issues.

Respondents to the survey were organizations involved in news and information analysis from government agencies, educational institutions, planning units, private companies and non-governmental organizations. It has been suggested that the research project continue for a certain period, up to three years or even longer, so that the purpose of the project will be achieved for the benefit of giving an early warning for the country.