

## Article by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Satapon Keovimol

BSIE. (University of Oklahoma) MSIE. (New Jersey Institute of Technology) Dr.Ing. (Universite De Nice) France

Faculty of Engineering. King Mongkut's Institute of Technology North Bangkok

Advisor of the Special Committee for Studying Thai-Canal Project of the Senate

Advisor of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights of the Senate

### Thai Canal to end southern disputes

The disputes in the 3 southern provinces of Thailand have been around for a long time. But at the present, news of the situation in those provinces about violence and battles pour out continuously. The present situation has effect and is discontending news to the whole country inevitably.



Image 1 Map of the southern of Thailand, Patanee, Yala and Narathiwat province

The disputes in the southern part of Thailand are really mass-psychological problems. People who know the problems and their reasons such as the citizens in the area or the military can investigate and gather information or even know the parties involved in creating these problems but everything is still in a whirlpool. Nothing can be done except coping with the situations as can be seen in the continuing news.

Solving the problem by declaring martial laws are successful in a level but when the control stops, the shooting, the looting or even the school and government property burning will return.

The people causing these problems want the situation in the area to be bad by endlessly causing disputes to call attention and to show the groups potential. And with the terrorist problems around the world, these problems are increasing. Although the problems happening may be local problems, if we let these problems to continue, these groups will try to turn in to international terrorists.

Every government, in the past and in the present have difficulties and are uncomfortable. They care about the emotional impact of the citizens in the three provinces. They are not able to separate innocent citizens from the perpetrators. So there seems to be a wall covering these perpetrators, for

them to continue causing trouble. When the government is unable to give security to the citizens in the area, every Thai citizen must be uncomfortable too. We see that every government knows the way to solve these problems, which is to bring prosperity into the area, in education, in facilities along with creating jobs in the area. But the perpetrators know this too, they know that when prosperity comes into the area, they will be in trouble. So the situations such as burning government properties and schools or shooting citizens to create fear and to stop these developments in the area. When development in the area is hard, the job of the government in solving the disputes will be hard too.

From the government meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2004 at Patanee, the Prime Minister Dr. Taksin Shinawatra had said that development and prosperity in the area will create a better life for the citizens in the area and will reduce the problems from the perpetrators. What he said is correct, but the problem is, how can we bring prosperity into the area? Only money won't create prosperity in the area because even though we use funds to create roads into the area, to create schools, universities, hospitals or factories. The following question is, how can we protect these properties? We will have to hire people or will have to depend on local cooperation to protect these properties. With the local population of 4 million and space of more than 32 billion square meters, how can we protect these properties until the local population is strong enough financially and mentally. If we can't find the answer to solve the problem, it will be like building a house without the ability to keep it.

From the opportunities to travel south, I see that the southern part of Thailand is better than any other part of Thailand, geographically. So I question why the people in the area are still troubled in living. There is a thought that we should use these geographical advantages to solve the problems in the area. There should be a plan to create the Thai Canal. Many may question how the Thai Canal involves the problem solving in the area. These are the benefits after the Thai Canal is completed.

1. Population Increase, If the Thai Canal is created, people from every part of Thailand will flow to work or create businesses in the area. In the present the population density in the area is still low, about 100-200 people per square kilometer. When the population increases along with the development. The wrong things will be investigated and seen by the population. Having population from every part of Thailand in the area with jobs will make the population in the area increase to 3-4 million in no time. Not only Thais but also foreigners will invest in the area, so the area will be a new city with prosperity like international ports such as Busan of South Korea that have profit from their port. The local income of Busan is 7 million million baht, which is more than every part of Thailand combined together while the population of Busan is only 4.5 million. Singapore is another example. The population increase in the area will be like having a people's army to defend the 3 provinces because prosperity in the area will create a force that nothing can stop.



Image 2 Port of Busan, South Korea 93 years ago (1910)

2. Adding value to the area, in the present the area of the 3 southern provinces are mostly rubber tree forests. A good hiding ground for terrorists. For economical development the value of the area must be increased, benefits from rubber can be changed to other things. Terrorists won't be able to use the terrain for hiding anymore. When the area is safe and ready for jobs, there will be a need for every level of labor. So the area of the 3 southern provinces will be more valuable. Citizens will be better financially than using the area for agricultural production such as Palm plantations or growing rubber trees. The southern part of Thailand will become a new tourist attraction with interesting sites and culture that everyone will be interested in.



Image 3 Port of Busan, South Korea (2002)

3. Reduce the economical differences with neighboring countries. Creating the canal will drain power from terrorists and gangsters to cities, because prosperity will flow through all the country. Not only in the canal line but also at the Malaysian-Thai border too. Eliminating the problems citizens have about their security from gangsters in rural places. And with the reason that the southern part of Thailand is less developed than the Malaysian side may make the citizens of the area apart from Thailand.



Image 4 Pudong, Special economical zone, across from Shanghai, China (1930)

4. We will have a better stand in negotiating with neighboring countries that need to use the sea route. Malaysia will want to use a cheap route in developing the northern part of Malaysia, they will have to use the Thai Canal. So it will help the development in the 3 southern provinces because there will be many jobs to complete.



Image 5 Pudong, Special economical zone, across from Shanghai, China (2002)

5. The country's main income will change. From the agricultural or industrial sector to the business, trade and service sector. If the Thai Canal is completed, the benefits of prosperity won't only be in the south but will come to every part of Thailand. Because the Thai Canal means creating stable jobs. Besides creating millions of job positions, sea travel and transportation businesses will use the area around the Thai Canal. The country's income will change from the agricultural and industrial sector to the business sector in services (warehouses, construction and sea transportation) and travel. The same as Singapore, Busan, South Korea, we can see that these cities have more income than the whole Thailand even though the population is lower than 5 million. (Image 4 and Image 5 displays the change of Pudong, which is across Shanghai. China has developed Pudong to be a special economic zone from farmland as displayed in less than 20 years.)



Image 6 Port of Singapore

In summary, Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra by the consent of the government, have issued more than 20,000 million baht for the development of the 3 southern provinces. It isn't much money when we consider the benefits we will receive and it's a good sign bringing prosperity to the citizens there. If that money can help the citizens develop to solve the problems in the area then the money is worthwhile. The economical return in travel, agricultural and industrial products will be many times more than the money the government invested. But if everything isn't as the government intended, maybe the government should consider the possibility in creating the Thai Canal.