

President Report

Board of Trustees Meeting
16 February 2017

Chairman and Members of the Board of Trustees, and Colleagues.

I would like to begin by stating that I have been President for three and half years now — one year as an Interim President, and two and a half years as President. In the last Board Meeting, I have declared that I shall not seek another term of office even though I am eligible to. Thus, I have one and half years remaining to discharge my duties as AIT President. I intend to continue focusing my efforts to improve AIT's good governance, and to ensure that AIT's financial health is in a good and stable position so the new President can continue on the path to take AIT to new heights.

All of you are fully aware that when I took my office, I was besieged with so many issues that confronted AIT, while we had only limited resources. With our tumbled general reserve and so many pressing needs, even a small mistake could have pushed AIT towards a path of collapse. Under this survival mode, I had to take full control of all operations to ensure that our strategic plan (to rescue AIT) can be executed to a perfection.

The first measure that I initiated was to boost the morale of our depressed faculty and staff, and even students. Many faculty members had left, as they were not sure whether AIT would survive. Further, we had to normalize our relations with the host country, as without their support, AIT had no rationale to exist here.

Another pressing issue was how to regain public confidence in our academic standing. As a postgraduate-only institute, AIT was not eligible to participate in the 3 major world university rankings. This led to a wild speculation that AIT's world ranking might be off the lower limit of the chart. Some alumni even concluded that academically AIT was inferior to local universities in Thailand.

As President, I took this particular issue very seriously. We directly explored with the major ranking organizations. We found that even AIT was not eligible for world university rankings as Institute, AIT could participate in the QS world university ranking by subject. It turned out that for three years in a row (2014-16), all the traditional subject areas of AIT have been world-ranked, in par with many well-known universities in the west. Being in Thailand, we also sought to enter the Thailand University Rankings organized by the Thailand Research Fund (TRF). In its first official participation, AIT secured top-score in 7 out of the 10 participated disciplines. It was proud moment, as AIT President, to receive the Grand Prize in Thailand for obtaining the most top scores among all universities operating in Thailand. These measures helped us regain the trust of our host country as well as that of our partners.

Another important task was to take care of our campus and its environment. Our campus was damaged by the floods to a point where many thought that it could not be saved at all. A lot of thinking and planning went into this exercise. While we were short of cash flow, the repair and rejuvenation of the campus had to be carried out in phases, which will also ensure minimum disturbance to our ongoing academic activities. Today, as you may witness, the campus environment appears to have no distressed sign of flood damage. Many visitors commented that our campus looks even better than it was before the flood.

Talking about the campus renovation, I have to thank our friends, alumni, and partners, for their generous donation to our Library Modernization Campaign. We were able to raise 80 million baht to create a modern library, which was highlighted in the special edition of newsletter tabled in front of you today. This generous donation not only allowed AIT to afford a modern library that

meets the needs of the digital age, but also saved the needed fund from the flood insurance to be available for renovating our age-old infrastructure and for the final touch of our campus. Thus, aside from the alumni-donated clock tower, AIT will have a new signature gate, a new entrance sign board, new footpath from the highway to AIT Conference Center, and a modern bus-stop shelter. Finally, there will be more improvements on our landscape. However, we may have to look for additional fund to resurface our road pavement inside the campus.

Today, we can happily say that AIT is in state of normalcy, and this has allowed me to dedicate more responsibilities to my three Vice Presidents. I am thankful to Vice President for Academic Affairs, Prof. Sivanappan Kumar who now shoulders the heavy load of both Academic Affairs as well as Research. We also began the process of decentralization of our administration to Schools as well as all Outreach Responsibility Centers (RCs). Each school or RC is allowed to run its own internal affairs under its dean or director. Thus, in line with the approval of the Board in 2015, we have also decentralized a part of the AIT annual reserve to all the contributing schools and RCs for their capital investments. I have requested our Vice President for Administration, Prof. Kazuo Yamamoto to help me supervise all the Outreach RCs. On the international front, I have the support of my new Vice President for Development, Mr. Surendra Shrestha, who was asked to focus his effort on resource generations from international organizations.

With the support of the Board, we also decided that the School of Management (SOM) should be moved out of the traditional Institute basket, to have its own way of operations. With the recruitment of the new Dean and with special arrangements in place, Dean Prof. Lawrence Stephen Abeln is expected to bring his vast experiences from MIT, Cambridge and Adelaide to AIT, and make AIT a reputed international business school in the global arena.

Finally, I must say that I have been grateful to all members of the Board, especially the Board Chair for providing me with the needed encouragement and advices during the difficult period of AIT. Thank you all.