

## FOREWORD

Among the highlights of the ABAC Journal in past years have been the insightful articles on international, political and economic affairs written by Prof. Dr. Ioan Voicu. Dr. Voicu has brought to our readers not only the benefit of his great knowledge and experience but also his careful observations of important meetings. We are very pleased to bring to our readers in this issue another in this series of articles, this one analyzing the diplomatic meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2009, which reflected the ASEAN Charter which came into force in 2008. Dr. Voicu is quite optimistic about the results of these meetings, which included adoption of proposals in such critical areas as education, human rights, and climate change. Although recognizing the limitations of ASEAN, Dr. Voicu finds that the potential for this regional institution, as manifested in the 2009 meetings, remains high.

Much of the rest of this issue deals with economic and business matters. For example, Prof. Nadim Jahangir, Prof. Noorjahan Parvez and Prof. Dhrubanil Bhattacharjee examine the willingness of Bangladeshi college students to buy computer parts on the basis of a variety of factors. Somewhat surprisingly, the authors found that brand name played a very limited role in the decision-making process, which was mainly guided by practical considerations. This is especially significant given the emphasis on the concept of branding in recent years. Also considering the economy of Bangladesh, Prof. Mohammad A. Ashraf and Prof. Sarker Rafij Ahmed Ratan examine the important practice of microfinancing that many have found to be among the most important of instruments for encouraging SMEs and individual development in developing nations. The authors of this article evaluate that claim and find it not entirely valid. Based on their data, the rural poor of the country, the group most in need of economic progress, have significant disincentives for participating in such programs and suggest that an alternative means must be found for them.

In the past, the major concern of business enterprises took the form of physical goods, but in recent years, information and knowledge have increasingly been recognized as critical resources for the economy which must be managed as carefully as inventory, tools, and human resources. Prof. Chanin Yoopetch's article carefully considers the factors that are involved in such management in Thai banks. Prof. Haitham Al Shibly turns aside from the perspective of the business owner to that of the consumer. The two groups

of economic actors cannot be truly separated of course and it is incumbent upon all business owners to consider the ways that his or her customer is empowered. In Prof. Haitham Al Shibly's article, the issue of customer empowerment is considered both from the perspective of the customer having the power to adapt the product to their own needs and desires, and from the owners' perspective the trust and communication that go into the transaction. This dimension of economic activity is thus seen as a complex process involving psychology, economics, and social relations.

A new regular feature of the Journal will be a book review section, and in this issue Dr. Noel Jones examines Daniel H. Pink's *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*. Although the basis of the book is found in brain science, its focus, like much of the rest of the issue, is on economics, as the author of the book suggests that the people with more creative and synthetic patterns of thought will play the central role in the future rather than the analytic types who have dominated the past period.

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