

*Early warnings as well as preparedness are required to avert disasters. A UN agency is working to help countries in Asia be warned and ready.*

## WEEKENDBRUNCH

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agency so that they have time to prepare in case the formation becomes a real threat.

“For disaster management, we need early warning as well as preparedness. If we lack either, we could end up in a serious situation similar to the one Typhoon Katrina caused in the US [in which the absence of preparedness was blamed for disastrous consequences].

“Our system, as well as its sophisticated software, has been jointly designed by scientists from several countries, such as India and the US, as well as those working at AIT,” he said.

For tsunami warnings, the surveillance system, funded by the UN/Escap with a budget of US\$2 million (Bt63.3 million), will be linked with earthquake monitoring stations in 23 countries in Asia Pacific and deep-water buoys that constantly measure ocean levels.

To forecast severe weather, the system could be linked with international centres such as the US Navy’s Joint Typhoon Warning Centre – the same agency that issued an alert on the cyclone formation in the Bay of Bengal on April 27.

“In such a case, our computer model would continue monitoring the formation over several days until it lands onshore somewhere in Burma. We could then pass on the information to Burma’s meteorological

Having spent the past 18 years in the political arena, Dr Bhichit Rattakul, 61, a former science minister and Bangkok governor, decided last January to take a break.

“I’m now working full time as executive director of Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre [ADPC], which was set up under the auspices of United Nations about 21 years ago. It’s more fun than being a politician.

“Today, ADPC is an autonomous body whose charter has been ratified by nine countries in Asia Pacific with the aim of strengthening readiness in managing disasters.

“We focus on Asean nations and other countries in South Asia where training services are provided to governments and non-governmental organisations. We also help in making plans to manage and mitigate disasters at the community or provincial levels.

“Coming up next is a region-wide surveillance system involving 23 countries aimed at providing early warnings about cyclones, typhoons, tsunami and other hydro-meteorological hazards.

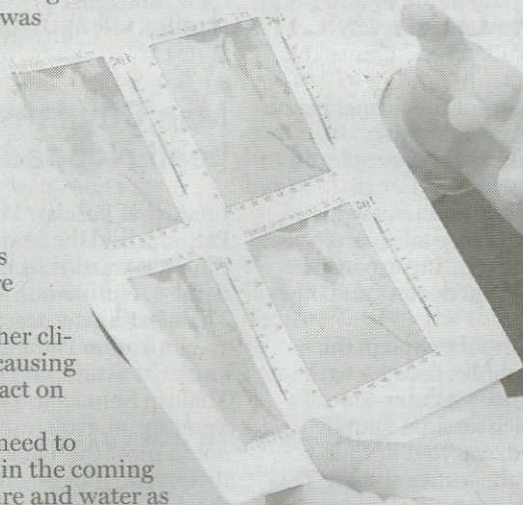
“Starting this September, a supercomputer stalled at Bangkok’s Asian Institute of Technology [AIT] will become operational, allowing ADPC to give out early warnings.

“The system’s computing power is equivalent to a total of 1,400 PCs. Thus, we will have a powerful tool for forecasting climatic changes,” Bhichit, who was awarded a PhD in chemical engineering at Brigham Young University in 1976, said.

Bhichit, who championed environmental protection while he was Bangkok governor more than a decade ago, said global warming and other climatic phenomena are causing serious, negative impact on mankind.

“As a result, we will need to adapt to these changes in the coming years because agriculture and water as well as other natural resources could be hard. Farm output, for instance, could be adversely affected.

“One of the solutions is to give out early warnings, such as reliable weather forecasts so that we can prepare well in advance in terms of investment management as well as avoiding loss of life and property,” he said.



Dr Bhichit Rattakul