



# It all gets back to nature

**A wise man, writes Thanong Khanthong, remains as gentle as the flowers he loves**

**S**ociety should never forget or abandon its sages. Eventually, to Rapee Sagarik, everything goes back to the fundamental question of life, of the way of nature and this world.

If we have love and respect for other people, even though they are only common villagers, then we have discovered ourselves, having a good heart and sincerity, which are the most important things of all, he believes.

At 84, his health might be failing, but his mind is as sharp as ever. At his Phaholyothin home near Kasetsart University,

Thailand's foremost orchid expert and conservationist still welcomes visitors almost every day. His former students and admirers of his work and way of life come to seek his advice and wisdom in a Plato-like atmosphere. They come because they respect his views, his humbleness and his passion for Thai society.

One of his admirers, Sakchai Guy, has paid all his medical bills. He also helped renovate Rapee's home at his own expense because of his very high respect for Rapee.

An encounter with Rapee is a learning experience about the harmony of life. He is a sage and humanist,

with deep love and respect for his fellow human beings, animals and plants. To him, they all have souls and represent a living organism with a nature of their own, flourishing together in the process of life, but he laments that this beautiful world is gradually being destroyed.

Rapee becomes rather uncomfortable when people associate him with orchids. "Are you still studying orchids? Which areas of orchids are you interested in now?" These are the common questions immediately posed to him in the first greeting. It is true that Rapee is a world-renowned orchid expert. He has con-

ducted research in orchids through most of his academic career, since 1940 when Thai forests were still rich and resourceful.

The orchid is only part of his life – not the totality of his being. He has adopted a holistic approach towards his career, work and life, so completely that orchids represent only one activity that leads him to a deep understanding of the inter-relationships amongst all phenomena of this world.

Rapee has been curious about orchids since the age of 10 when his father, a senior police officer serving under King Vajiravudh, one

► **Page 109**