



Veteran leader

A career envoy successfully negotiated his way through political and diplomatic minefields. As **Pravit Rojanaphruk** reports, he eventually led the country

There's no doubt that Anand Panyarachun has been one of the country's most influential persons over the past 35 years, but was he also the most influential "diplomat" over the past three and a half decades? It depends on how broadly or narrowly one defines a diplomat and the concept of diplomacy.

Anand's life as a career diplomat came to an abrupt end soon after the tumultuous event of October 6, 1976, when right-wing conservative forces lynched scores of socialist students at Thammasat University and the democratic government was overthrown by a coup.

Anand, then one of the youngest ever permanent secretaries at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, was accused of being a communist, a criminal charge during the Cold War peri-

od. He was later cleared of the charge but demoted de-facto by being transferred to Bonn, West Germany, as ambassador. A year after serving in Bonn, Anand's diplomatic career officially ended when he resigned to join the business sector - ending a 23-year career in the Thai foreign services.

As a senior career diplomat, Anand played a crucial role in establishing ties with the socialist states of Vietnam, Laos, and China. Anand headed the negotiations that led to the eventual withdrawal of US troops from Thai soil at a time when the Cold War threatened to engulf the region.

The negotiations for withdrawal of US troops from Thailand in 1975, which at the height of the Vietnam War numbered 48,000, was timely and crucial. Even before a unified Vietnam declared itself a socialist republic in 1976, progressive Thai politicians and diplomats

It is anyone's guess what might have happened to Thailand had it continued to allow US troops, which were becoming increasingly unpopular abroad and locally, to stay.

realised that the Vietnam War was lost and it was time for the US troops to stop using Thai soil, which they had done since 1964, as a base from which to bombard Vietnamese troops and civilians. "Thailand realigned its foreign policy despite the fact that it used to go along with the Americans," Asda Jayanama, a former senior diplomat told *The Nation*. "The Americans didn't want to pull their troops out because they had already been forced out of South Vietnam."

Asda praised both Anand, who was permanent secretary for foreign affairs, and the then Prime Minister MR Kukrit Pramoj, for "laying a sound foundation" for ties with Vietnam and China, although at the time it fuelled suspicions that Anand had left-wing leanings.

"Nobody doubts Khun Anand's ability", said Asda.

"The Americans were caught off-guard when Thailand gave this ultimatum," said Prajit Rojanaphruk, another former senior diplomat who was a member of the Thai negotiation team, which submitted the one-page ultimatum to the US at that time.

Prajit praised Anand's negotiating and leadership skills but added however, that credit should also go to PM Kukrit who was then the top policy maker. "We realised the Americans could not contain communist threats and so we befriended China."

It is anyone's guess what might have happened to Thailand had it continued to allow US troops, which were becoming increasingly unpopular abroad and locally, to stay.

When Anand's distinguished diplomatic career, which included a