



► **From page 24**

long stint as Thailand's permanent representative to the United Nations and ambassador to Washington ended with his resignation in 1977, he joined the private sector. Even as a businessman Anand managed to play a crucial role in the establishment of the Asean Free Trade Area.

However, it was Anand's brief role as twice non-elected, accidental and yet hugely popular prime minister in 1991 and 1992 that undoubtedly won him a legion of admirers and accolades, especially amongst the well-educated middle class who regarded him as one of the most incorruptible, principled and able leaders in the country's modern history. The stint also made him one of the most influential Thais alive with a string of books extolling his virtues and views.

One such book, entitled "Words of Wit from Anand Panyarachun: A Good Man Whom The Society Still Needs" divided his opinions into 26

sections, ranging from his views on diplomacy ("There's little justice in international politics and it depends on which country that justice belongs to"); to society, in which Anand reminded his admirers he was no knight in shining armour and that the future was in the hands of all Thai citizens.

Social critic Sulak Sivaraksa argues that Anand possessed tact, intellectual ability, courage, and was a smooth operator. That's why this Cambridge-trained diplomat-turned-businessman-turned-prime minister was so successful and popular.

Sulak argues that Anand employed his diplomatic skills to keep his two Cabinets effective, thus his diplomatic skills were never really abandoned after his main diplomatic career ended. Though a personal friend of Anand's, the social critic pointed out that Anand had no qualms about serving dictators. To Anand, however, becoming a prime minister for the first time in 1991 after a military coup overthrew

the elected government of Chatichai Choonhavan, was a difficult decision. Coup leader Suchinda Kraprayoon was an Army attache back in the seventies when Anand was in the diplomatic corps, and this has been said to be partly responsible for Anand's selection.

Eventually he decided to accept the top job with the hope that he could steer Thailand back towards democracy, something in which he eventually succeeded.

Not everyone however, is fond of Anand. Some, like activists opposed to the privatisation of public utilities, blamed him for starting privatisation and for adhering to an almost fundamentalist view of market liberalisation. Others ask why Anand, as premier, allowed a multi-billion-baht telephone concession to a business conglomerate, which later appointed as its honorary chairman the military coup leader responsible for initiating Anand's move into the political office.

After two stints as prime minister, Anand continued to play impor-

tant roles in many spheres, as chairman of the assembly that oversaw what was to become the 1997 "People's Constitution". No doubt his tact and other diplomatic skills were put to good use. In 2003, many Thais were proud of his appointment as head of the United Nations' High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Anand became a leading advocate against corruption. He also agreed to head the National Reconciliation Commission in 2005 in the hope that some solution to the ongoing violence in the South would be found.

Ironically, Asda argued that despite Anand's reputation as an independent and straightforward diplomat, and with near universal praise, it is in the Foreign Affairs Ministry today that his legacy is under threat.

"Khun Anand told me that things have changed, unlike years ago. They're spineless now," said Asda of the new climate at the ministry. ■

“ There's little justice in international politics and it depends on which country that justice belongs to. ”