

Powerful commentator



When an influential political commentator speaks, society pays attention. Nantiya Tangwisutijit reports on his incredible acumen

‘Who exactly is this guy? How did he manage to get so many reporters to his press conference at 9am on a Sunday?’ whispered a foreign correspondent to a Thai reporter next to him.

That was back in 2003, so by now the correspondent has probably worked in Thailand long enough to know that few reporters in Thai politics could

afford to miss Thirayuth Boonmi’s annual political and social analysis. Since 1987, Thirayuth has made it a custom to speak to the media, offering his sharp, well-rounded commentaries. He is known to pull no punches when it comes to pointing out where a ruling government could do better.

Like it or not, every time he speaks, Thai society pays attention. The government press officers work overtime, lining up spokesmen to hit back at

Thirayuth. In a perverse way, the last Thaksin Shinawatra government gave Thirayuth extra credibility because the premier himself would be the first to lash out at the sharp-tongued critic.

Thaksin has told the public not to listen to Thirayuth, “because he is only self-marketing and seeking hero status”. Yet the more Thaksin showed anger at Thirayuth, the more people paid attention to his remarks, wondering if the pre-

mier was upset by facts he did not want people to hear.

In 2003, as Thaksin was entering his second year as prime minister, Thirayuth stated that Thaksin was at a crossroads – he could become a successful reformer or he could drive the country into a state of political and social bankruptcy with his CEO-style leadership. He predicted that Thaksin would lean towards the latter.

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