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made the journey from a primary school of bamboo and thatch in the Kanchanaburi forest, where he was the top student, to the government faculty of medicine at Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University, (then the University of Medical Sciences), where he received a gold medal for the best academic record. He then received a scholarship to study abroad in 1957. He continued his advanced studies in hematology at the University of Colorado, and in human genetics at London University.

During the past decades in Thailand the doctor healed not only patients in hospitals. He also played a vital role healing social crises in the country.

After the political crisis in May 1992, Prawase was among the first to talk about political reform. He was a force behind not only the 1994 Constitution, but also other reforms to advance citizens' rights and people participation.

In 1995, on behalf of the president of the Committee for Developing Democracy (CDD), Prawase held public hearings around the country to provide opportunities for people's participation in the political process. The CDD came up with recommendations to Parliament, saying that political reform was an alternative when Thailand was in crisis. There was no need to use violence to deal with the situation.

"The CDD isn't a political organisation and doesn't play political games in the recommendations," Prawase wrote in a letter to the president of Parliament.

Prawase led the campaign for political reform through the new Constitution. He suggested that the major goal for Thailand should be to build on such basic moral principles as a respect for nature and the value of all human beings, especially at the grassroots level. "The Constitution has to be written with this major principle in mind," he said at the time.

The major principles that the senior citizen calls for include dynamic relationships, a learning and caring society, an independent judicial system, a trusted and transparent society,



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checked and balanced power, and a stable financial system without political intervention.

Visitors to his homepage, www.prawase.com, will see his determination to build a better society through political reform. Prawase continues giving speeches and writing on the issue.

His proposals always offer suggestions for how the powers that be could become more

concerned about moral principles in politics.

Amid political and moral crises, Prawase believes that Thailand is a compromising society and a society of forgiveness. Prawase keeps reminding the public that Buddhist teachings could heal most conflicts in this society. He has always attempted to follow the Buddha's path in his teaching and campaigning for a better

society. During the recent political crisis, Prawase suggested that caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the five leaders of the People Alliance for Democracy (PAD) be ordained in order to end their confrontation.

He said that in the past, King Rama IV (King Chomkhlaol) used this idea to avoid political conflict.

Prawase said the political conflict could be solved if rulers used Ahimsa Dharma (Ahimsa) – an absence of anger – to govern the country. The senior citizen praises former president Nelson Mandela of South Africa as a good model of a leader who used Ahimsa Dharma to reconcile his country. Prawase has a strong belief in a society of forgiveness and warns his followers and admirers not to be emotional in doing anything or in any conflicts.

"Many times we become emotional when involved in conflicts but Ajarn Prawase warns us not to do that. He often gave the example of the internal political conflict between China and Chiang Kai-shek, saying Chiang Kai-shek was allowed to go free after failing in the Chinese Civil War," one of Prawase's student recalled.

In Thailand's current political environment, dominated by what many call "money politics", Prawase said that people's politics is an alternative within a democratic framework.

Prawase has also played a vital role in education reform.

His idea to build a learning society led to the birth of the Thailand Research Fund in 1992, the Health Systems Research Institute in 1992, and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation in 2001.

However, the senior citizen, now 75, said in a recent article that his eight suggestions at a public lecture to anyone who would become prime minister after the election in 2001 had failed.

"A basic weakness of Thai society still remains. Thai people and all sectors of society needed to join hands to seriously consider our ways of thinking and the social structure that weakened us," Prawase said. ■