



# A long battle to win justice

**H**ai Khanjantha has been an icon to the grassroots people, for she teaches a great lesson – that the power of the people has nothing to do with their numbers.

When the now-defunct Office of Accelerated Rural Development seized her paddy fields to use as a reservoir for the Huay Ra Haa dyke in 1976, without giving any compensation, “Grandma” Hai voiced her grievance by joining the big demonstrations of several people’s movements, including the largest and most recognised, the Assembly of the Poor. Unfortunately, her voice was never heard.

Then one day she decided to take the matter into her own hands – literally.

On April 20, 2004, she and her family started trying to dismantle the dyke with hammers. That made her special in the eyes of the ordinary rural people. Her voice could no longer be ignored by many including the government, which had neglected her for almost 30 years.

Instead of being condemned by the public at large for destroying public property, the then 76-year-old grandmother received moral support and sympathy, even from the middle-class Bangkok people who often complained about protests by the poor.

The 30-year fight of a rural grandmother finally ended in success, reports **Pennapa Hongthong**

Many SMS messages were sent to the high-profile television news-talk programme “Theung Look Theung Khon”, which invited her on as guest speaker three times within a month, demanding the government provide justice by compensating her for 62 rai of paddy fields.

With a strong mind behind her wrinkled skin, Grandma Hai successfully convinced people that a hammer was the way to make her voice heard after 30 years of patient but futile fighting in the way governments prefer. Paying tribute to her, *The Nation’s* May 14 issue that year devoted a full colour page to her in recognition of her peaceful and

democratic fight.

The Natan Tambon Administration Organisation (TAO), which filed a legal case against her, was roundly condemned.

A popular television documentary show “Khon-Khon-Khon” also presented her life in a one-hour programme.

Less than a month after the first time she hit the dyke with a hammer, Grandma Hai received what she had struggled for over three decades.

Yongyuth Tiyapairat, the environment minister at the time, announced that the government would help Grandma Hai “because a mistake was made in the bureaucratic

► Page 42