



# The brain behind the boom

Recognised as a thorough technocrat, write **Business Reporters**, it was his growth-oriented policies that propelled the economy

In the early 1980s, Thailand undertook a drastic economic-reform programme through deregulation and an economic shift to become more export-oriented. In response, the World Bank called the Thai model a "miracle".

This had much to do with the leadership of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda, who was in power between 1980 and 1988.

Prem's reform programme would not have been successfully implemented without the contribution of dedicated Thai technocrats, and Dr Sanoh Unakul stood out as the most prominent technocrat during a change that laid the foundation for Thailand as an emerging economy to be reckoned with.

In his article, "No Crisis Please", in the January-March 1998 edition of *Inside Indonesia*, noted academic Priyambudi compared the leadership of Prem and that of Indonesia's President Suharto, both of whom were trying to modernise their countries through deregulation and reform and who were both aided by capable technocrats.

"Both came from the military but were supported by the political elites of each country," he wrote. "Prem and Suharto received much help from economic advisers who were independent, disciplined and apolitical. Most had doctorate degrees from American universities.

Dr Sanoh Unakul in Thailand and Professor Wijoyo Nitisastro in Indonesia formed teams that often consulted with Prem and Suharto, and this resulted in economic policies inducing rapid growth."

Sanoh is recognised as Thailand's foremost technocrat, well-versed in both economics and development planning. The most brilliant part of his life unfolded as he served as secretary-general of the National Economic and Social Development Board, Thailand's think tank.

Under Sanoh, the NESDB was responsible for planning all the

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