

# THE BENEVOLENT CAMPAIGNER

Anand Panyarachun earned his reputation as one of Thailand's most incorruptible prime ministers. Now he is using his formidable political and business clout to push for a more democratic and equitable society. By Ben Davies.

The secretary of Anand Panyarachun bears disappointing news. The former Thai premier is booked for lunch for at least the next five weeks and will sadly be unable to dine in the company of *Asiamoney*. Instead of fine Italian cuisine in an ambient setting, we resign ourselves to an interview over tea and biscuits.

In retrospect, this is hardly surprising. Our prospective luncheon guest is two times prime minister, a former Thai ambassador to Canada, the US and the United Nations, as well as chairman of the Saha Union group of companies. He is also on the board of various transnationals, chairman of the board of the Asian Institute of Technology and a speaker of repute on the international conference circuit.

It's an impressive schedule for a man who quietly confesses that he had planned to retire 16 years ago. "One day I really will call it a day," admits the 69-year old with a wry smile and a shrug of the shoulders that says as much about his enjoyment of work as it does about his wish to spend more time with his family.

Anand first emerged on the political stage back in March 1991 when he was invited to head up a coup-installed government. A relatively unknown figure at the time, the Cambridge-educated law graduate pushed through some of the most important legislation in the country's history, including more than 20 financial bills, in just 13 months. In June 1992 Anand was again invited to head up an interim administration following a constitutional crisis in which scores of protesters were killed and wounded on the streets of Bangkok. During his brief term in public office, Anand instilled a level of efficiency and honesty which has probably not since been matched.

"I refused to kowtow to the military," he says. "I refused to tolerate corruption. I reached out to the people because I had no political or military base. That enabled me to survive."

Despite two stints in office, Anand confesses that he never felt comfortable as a fully-fledged politician. And so after stepping down from the premiership a second time, he moved into an arena where his experience and formidable public stature could be put to even better use: as one of the



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key architects of the new constitution. In this role, Anand helped draft laws aimed at reining in corrupt politicians and promoting a true and functioning democracy – something he regards as crucial to the future wellbeing of the country.

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Anand accepts that such a transition cannot be achieved overnight and that for every two steps forward there will be one step back. But in the longer-term, he remains cautiously optimistic.

Besides building the foundations for a more democratic society, there are plenty of other matters uppermost on Anand's mind – like improving education, safeguarding the environment and boosting social welfare. He is actively involved in an advisory capacity with Dulwich International College as well as the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Such responsibilities tie in with his all embracing philosophy: to improve society. It's a philosophy that Anand prefers not to define in the philanthropic terms that fall so easily to the lips of George Soros or Bill Gates. "At my age, I just get on with my own thing," he says.

So what would the political crusader-cum-business guru like to be best remembered for? Anand thinks for a moment, sits back and with the modesty for which he is renowned says, "I would like to be remembered as a good man – not a great man – but a man who tried to do something for the people."

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