

Address by Anand Panyarachun
On the launching of the King of Thailand in World Focus
23 August 2007 at the Oriental, Bangkok

Madame President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be invited to attend this evening's function for the launching of the second edition of "The King of Thailand in World Focus" and to speak at this event.

Many of you present here tonight had first hand association with the making of the first edition. The book was published in 1988 as a tribute to His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej on the occasion of His Majesty's sixtieth Birthday Anniversary, Fifth Cycle in the Thai context, as well as on his becoming the longest reigning monarch in Thai history.

I should like to join my compatriots in expressing our deep appreciation to the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT) and its members for having taken this worthwhile initiative twenty years ago. Much work and enthusiastic efforts have gone into the production of the book, which in the words of Denis Gray, Editor-in-Chief, "was conceived out of a genuine respect" for the King and yet "intended as a meaningful record of the man and his times rather than merely as a laudatory exercise". This caveat does in no way inhibit the editors in naming him "Thailand's Renaissance King".

Obviously, the first edition was well-received by the public and was an instant success. So much so that when the time comes around to celebrate the King's 80th Birthday Anniversary on 5 December this year and to give proper recognition to his being the world's longest reigning living monarch, the FCCT decided to repeat the exercise by issuing the second edition to commemorate both milestones achieved by our beloved King.

The second edition, which is now before you, keeps intact the format used in the first edition, containing nine chapters of slightly changed headings to correspond with the ninth reign of the Chakri dynasty.

While the contents retain basically all the original text of the first edition, the present edition continues to be a collection of articles and images by foreign journalists and photographers up to the end of 2006, thus including the nation-wide historic celebrations last year of the 60th anniversary of the monarch's accession to the throne and the military intervention in September 2006.

More research was done to provide a larger input, both textual and photographic, into the current publication. The outcome resulted in 80 new articles and 240 more images from a wider selection of sources outside the FCCT circles.

In spite of some limitations arising out of traditions, local sensitivities and respect, the book is indeed a most comprehensive foreign journalistic documentary on the King.

Journalism, according to one popular definition, is the first draft of history, written in the blurred rush of events. Its tendency to be dramatic and insightful, therefore, cannot be overlooked. Human errors committed unwittingly or otherwise under deadline pressure are bound to crop up. Be that as it may, the King's profile as reflected in this book portrays a man of many talents and human qualities who for sixty odd years has unfailingly served his country and people to the best of his ability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

His Majesty began learning his constitutional craft in 1946 at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, where he changed his specialization from science to law and political science. This academic study was merely a primer – at best a theoretical course.

To understand the present-day Thai monarchy, one needs to go back to the founding of the first central Thai state, Sukhothai, in the thirteenth century. The pioneers of independence chose to elevate the wisest and most capable among them to be King. The King, having been entrusted with the task not out of any divine right, but by the consent of his peers, had an inherent obligation to rule the country “with righteousness”, not for the glory of himself or his family, but “for the benefit and happiness” of the people in his trust.

In his Oath of Accession to the Throne in 1946, as his ancestors had done, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej pledged to “reign with righteousness for the benefit and happiness of the Siamese people”. In his sixty-year reign, His Majesty has not deviated from that pledge and has indeed earned the love, admiration, and trust of his people in a manner that cannot be fully comprehended by foreigners.

The significance of his reign relates to three main themes: the well-being of his subjects, the security and stability of his nation, and national unity.

In the first four decades of his reign, the King travelled to every nook and corner of the country, meeting with the people, especially farmers and the poor in rural and remote areas as well as the hill tribes. Gathering information,

personally assessing the farming and agricultural areas, experimenting his new concepts and applying appropriate technology at his palace ground in Bangkok, His Majesty began a series of Royally-initiated projects.

His over three thousand projects to date deal with such areas as irrigation, water-resources management, forest and fishery conservation, soil erosion and improvement, crop-substitution, reforestation, land development, rural and community development, primary health care, eradication of leprosy, education, flood control, urban traffic and environmental protection. His wide-ranging interests, combined with his self-acquired technical knowledge and pragmatic approach based on local culture and wisdom, have enabled the poor, the underprivileged and the disenfranchised to lead a more hopeful and constructive life, thereby strengthening the social fabric of our society and fortifying our national cohesion and identity.

In recent years, the King's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has gained larger acceptance and more widespread application. It has also been adopted by the United Nations Development Programme.

His work in these development areas stems from his conviction that the well-being of the people is tantamount to the well-being of their sovereign. The two are inseparable and inter-related.

His concern for the security and stability of the Thai nation is reflected in the innumerable trips and lengthy visits that he, Her Majesty the Queen and other members of the Royal family, have made to the sensitive areas of the country which were confronted with communist insurgency movements or separatist, ethnic and religious-inspired bands of rebels and bandits. Their frequent visits were a morale booster to the populace. His Majesty's royal projects to uplift the living conditions of the people in those areas underline his own personal commitment and dedication to the people. His Majesty has proven by his deeds that he has an overriding interest in his subjects.

I have so far dwelled on the varied activities that His Majesty initiated, developed and implemented. These activities do not normally fall within the domain of a constitutional monarch. But the fact that His Majesty has persevered in these activities for the long-lasting benefit of the Thai people has very much endeared him to his subjects --- so much so that the Thais, in general, willingly and unreservedly accord our Sovereign the confidence and trust that no other monarch in our history, or for that matter any other monarch in the world, has ever enjoyed. The King has, in the process, gained the "reserve powers" which have been put to good use, whenever circumstances require.

As I stated previously, the King embarked early in his reign on a journey to know his people and, in the process, allowed them to get close to and know

him. At the same time, he used his time wisely to accumulate “constitutional” experience. His Majesty has been through 16 constitutions, 18 coups d’etat, and twenty-four prime ministers. He has an acute grasp of constitutional rule yet he remains detached from politics, playing a non-partisan role in the country’s political process and development.

As a constitutional monarch, however, the King possesses three discretionary powers : “the right to be consulted, the right to encourage and the right to warn”. Under normal circumstances, he exercises these prerogatives through private audiences he grants to the prime minister of the day. What transpires during these meetings remain private and confidential, and even after statutory silent period, parts of the consultations may never be known.

In a constitutional monarchy, the King does have formal powers and responsibilities under constitutional provisions. In exercising this function, he is ever conscious of his non-political role. All bills approved by the National Assembly are to be presented to the King for signature. This is not just a formality, as the King retains discretionary power to withhold his assent temporarily. In private consultations with the prime minister, the King’s observations, be they “encouraging” or “warning”, provide an important input for the head of government to reevaluate the government’s position and direction. His Majesty’s response to the issues raised by the prime minister is consistently advisory in nature and non-judgmental in politics. He adheres strictly to the letter and spirit of the constitution.

His remarks, whether made privately or publicly, are circumspect and often couched in discreet and indirect terms. So while they are listened to with great attention, there is no guarantee that His Majesty’s thinking is heard and properly understood.

The King has also been through a few crises in our political history. His non-partisan handling of the events produced results which in turn brought about tranquility and normality to the Kingdom.

Without His Majesty’s guiding hand, we would not be where we are today – a nation which has invariably demonstrated its inner strength, political resilience, social harmony and economic dynamism – a trait which has enabled the Thais to survive many a threat and misfortune in their long history.

The course of modern Thai political history will run smoothly and peacefully if and when the Thai political system pursues the “middle path” and a right balance is achieved between freedom and stability. His Majesty’s adoption of the balanced approach during his sixty-year reign serves as an inspiration for the governance of Thailand.

Incidentally, our King, as implied in his public address a few years ago, does not see himself as infallible --- a king who can do no wrong in the ordinary sense of the word. The King is not above criticism. In fact he welcomes critical comments based on facts and objectivity. The current legal constraint is not taken literally by him. He personally never made use or took advantage of this legal recourse to silence critics. Nor is he by royal convention in a position to answer or respond to these critics. He is unperturbed and proceeds to give royal pardon to those who are convicted.

The reverence and loyalty that the Thai people hold for His Majesty is in my view the reason for the existence of such law.

To the people in general, the Thai monarchy is not an abstract or irrelevant concept, but a responsive, caring and indispensable institution that is an integral part of their lives. His Majesty is seen by his subjects as “the People’s King”.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The second edition of “the King of Thailand in World Focus” offers a foreign perspective of the King’s life whereas I attempt tonight to present a Thai perspective of our King and his multifarious activities. They are not mutually exclusive and in many respects are even complementary.

I offer my thanks to the FCCT and the numerous individuals who produced this important book. They are friends of Thailand and make every effort to understand our Monarchy and the very special bond between our King and the Thai people.

The 50th anniversary of the FCCT in 2006 must be recognized as a significant landmark of the foreign media community in Thailand. My congratulations and best wishes go to all of you the good work done in the fifty-year span and also for this splendid book which, among other things, will serve to strengthen the ties of friendship between the FCCT and Thailand.

Thank you.