

Headlines

October martyrs remembered

The Organising Committee for the 14 Tula (October) has planned a diverse programme of activities to mark the 25th anniversary of the Oct 14, 1973, uprising between Oct 10 and 14. All events will take place at Sanam Luang unless otherwise stated.

Oct 10: 9 am -- Relatives of the Oct 14 activists will take part in an opening ceremony in front of the Veterans Monument near the National Museum. Other activities include a book fair, an exhibition on the history of the uprising and an art exhibition.

2 pm -- A musical entitled "Little Toddling Crab" will be put on by school children.

3 pm -- A seminar, "Youth's Social Awareness through Paintings", will be organised with Seawrite poet Phaiwarin Khao-ngarm and veteran writers Thongtham Natjamnong, Chalernsak Ngamngarm and artist Sinsawat Yodbangtoey.

4 pm -- A symposium called "History of Songs for Life after 1932" will have speakers such as radio programme host Nakhon Thanomsap, writers Thiraphap Lohitakul and Wat Wallayangkura.

Oct 11: 2 pm -- A concert with Tu Carry-on and Iew na Pan-nan.

3 pm -- A seminar on "Role of Songs for Life Music in Today's Society" with well-known musicians and singers, including Ad Carabao, Suthep Hope and Seepheuk Khondankwian.

5 pm -- Concert by Grand Canyon.

6 pm -- Children play the "Baan Mai Roo Roey".

6.30 pm -- Discussion on "One Year After the People's Constitution".

8 pm -- Concert by Fong Nam and Carabao

Oct 12: 2 pm -- Concert by the Klæ Taidin and Yodnam bands.

3 pm -- Seminar on the "Songs for Life after Oct 6, 1976: Music in the Jungle" with SeaWrite winner Sila Khomchai and well-known singers and musicians such as Mongkhon Uthok, Pong Tonkla, Nid Kammachon and Kamol Thimandaeng as guest speakers.

4.30 pm -- Concert by Mongkhon Uthok, Pong Tonkla and Ood Yannawa.

5 pm -- Concert by Hammer and Nuphab Savantracha.

6.30 pm -- Speeches from members of the organising committee and the public.

7 pm -- Plays and concerts put on by high school and university students.

7.30 pm -- Concert by Tom Dandee, Saksit Chueklang and Si Phueak

Oct 13: 2 pm -- Concert by East Footpath and Arak Arphakat.

3 pm -- Symposium on "Songs for Life after Oct 6, 1976: City Music" with members of Kiewdao, Phalang Phleng, Thammasat University Student Federation, Narukhahit, Plaewthien and Cheewee bands.

4.30 pm -- Concert by Kiewdao band, followed by a performance from Maenam Band at 7 pm and Phongsit "Poo" Khamphue at 7.30 pm.

Oct 14: 8.30 pm -- Phra Sripariyatimolee leads a procession from Sanam Luang to the Khokwua intersection to join the unveiling of the Oct 14 Heroes Monument.

2 pm -- Poetry recital on the silver jubilee of the Oct 14 incident from well-known poets such as Naowarat Phongphaiboon, Chiranan Phitpreecha, Phawarin Khao-narm, Wisa Khanthap, Wat Wallayangkura and Khomthuan Khanthanoo.

3 pm -- A discussion on "25 Years of Oct 14 Uprising: Perspective from Literary Work and Songs for Life" with Naowarat Phongphaiboon, Surachai Chanthimathorn, Wisa Khanthap, Wat Wallayangkura, Wirasak Sunthornsri and Sila Khomchai.

5 pm -- Performance by Pharadorn, Khomechai, Look Thung Sajjatham and Kammachon

7 pm -- "Lamtad" show featuring two groups of singers depicting humour in local politics through improvised poetry.

8 pm -- Concert by Caravan.

10.30 pm -- A mass recital of the song "Soo Mai Thoi" (Fighting Head-on) at the Democracy Monument.

More activities

Oct 10 to Oct 13: Paintings presented by members of the United Artists Front of Thailand at Sanam Luang.

Today to Oct 14: Film Festival on Asian Students and People's Uprising to be held at the Pridi Bhanomyong Library Building's Rewat Buddhinan Room, Thammasat University.

In commemoration of the uprising, Thammasat University Archives (TUA) have released the 14 Tula (Oct) video detailing the 1973 democratic revolution against the authoritarian regime.

The 55-minute video covers the events from Oct 6 to Oct 15, with scenes of student rallies at the Thammasat University, the massive march on the Rajdamnoen Avenue, the final collapse of the military junta and His Majesty the King delivering a speech on television.

The video is narrated in Thai with English subtitles and costs \$30.

TUA has also brought out a booklet of these events written in Thai by Dr Charnvit Kasetsiri and incorporating an English translation by Benedict Anderson.

Proceeds from the video sales go to TUA and orders can be submitted to the following address:

Thammasat University Archives, Thammasat University, Bangkok 10200, Thailand.

Call 222 0149 or e-mail: archives@alpha.tu.ac.th for more information.

The Nation

Politics

Rain fails to dampen Oct 14 commemorations

DESPITE Monday's rain, more than 5,000 people attended the third day of a five-day event to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Oct 14 uprising at Sanam Luang.

Over the past quarter century, there have been dramatic changes in terms of politics, society and in attitudes precipitated by that landmark event in Thailand's recent history.

"I'll never forget today with so many people turning out to commemorate this historical event," said Lamied Boonmak, 55, wife of activist Jirat Boonmak, who died on the frontline during the student uprising on Oct 14, 1973.

"In the past, it seemed Thai people had forgotten our heroes from 14 Oct, 1973. Today we are able to dismiss the claim that 'Thais easily forget'."

Lamied was one of 35 families of the Oct 14 heroes participating in the historical event at Sanam Luang. She attended the event with her son and sold roast pork in order to raise funds for the "14 Tula Heros' Relatives Association."

Monday, Sanam Luang was the stage for Thai people participating in the Kingdom's administration. Booths representing various NGOs, labour groups and human-rights groups dotted the royal lawn, transforming the venue into a forum for diverse social issues.

These NGOs took advantage of the new Constitution by encouraging the public to back their proposals with the aim of collecting 50,000 signatures, enough to

petition Parliament for reformist laws.

On the third day of the commemorations, the number of signatures was continuing to increase. Thirty non-governmental organisations demanding the punishment of all Public Health Ministry officials involved in the recent drug-scheme scandal, Monday collected 36,000 signatures.

Labour organisations have already collected 45,000 signatures to petition the government to push forward the law on the Institution of Protection on Health, Safety and Environment in the Work Place. Meanwhile, the UN Declaration on Human Rights also encouraged visitors to the event to raise their awareness on human rights issues. This year is the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

More than 40,000 small yellow paper birds, each containing a written message of hope towards a better society, were placed inside a white net. The birds, a symbol of the October struggle, will be consigned to art galleries nationwide and will be unfolded and subsequently read out at an event 25 years from now.

On the stage, labour representatives took turns to slam the government over the fact that although the new Constitution took effect in October, 1997, governments have failed to seriously try and resolve labour problems or put in place a safety net.

"Governments usually say that they will develop the country through industry, but they never carry out their promises. Many Thai labourers today have been laid off and discarded," Saneh Hongthong, a labour representative, told the crowd.

Tuesday, over 30 artists and activists will again paint on one 3 metre by 5 metre canvas on the theme of Rights and

Freedom Day.

BY SUBHATRA BHUMIPRABHAS

The Nation

Feature

ON SECOND THOUGHTS: Passing the torch to a new generation

FEW would argue that Thai society in general -- and particularly the younger generation -- benefitted from the student-led people's struggle of Oct 1973. We should be grateful to these heroes and martyrs and continue to carry their torch for greater freedom, social justice and democracy.

Yet it is how we choose to do so that is the issue. If we end up just reciting the same rhetoric, then I'm afraid that we, the younger generation (I was five-years-old at the time of the Oct 14, 73 uprising) will miss out on a golden opportunity to learn from the past.

Of the many invaluable lessons to be learned from the successes and failures of that generation, as well as from the events that preceded and followed the Oct 14 revolution, two immediately spring to my mind.

The first is perhaps best described as the ugly geo-political lesson.

There is no doubt that Thanom Kittikachon (PM-cum-dictator from Jan 1958 to Oct 20, 1958 and again from Dec 9, 1963 to Oct 14, 1973) was a crook who seized power by engineering "a coup against his own regime," -- a sick way of promulgating "out with the old and in with the new". Thanom and his clique may be compared to Suharto. Although who is the more evil is open to debate.

All regimes need supporters and in this case, the support came from none other than the government of the good old US of A.

The Yanks argue that they supported Thanom because they wanted to make sure that Thailand didn't fall into the hands of the dreaded commies. Yet Thanom, along with such other dictators as Sarith Thanarath, Pibulsongkram and Kriengsak Chamanand, were no better than the communists.

In the book *Radical Thought, Thai Mind: The Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Thailand*, Paul Wedel, former Bangkok Bureau chief of United Press International (UPI), states:

"The United States government... has been strongly on the side of the military dictators, propping them up with guns and money to maintain the bases and support needed for the war in Vietnam."

A few years ago, I met a 50-something Vietnamese writer in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Once he had established that I was indeed Thai, he asked me a question. "Why did you have to allow the Americans to use your country [as a base] to bomb and kill our people?"

What could I say to him except "sorry". Yes, I am Thai, but I was a child at the time. I'm deeply sorry for what happened but I couldn't have stopped it. Who listens to a toddler?

So why should I now re-open old wounds and bash the US for their past sins? We in Thailand now have a much more democratic government. The incumbent US president has been, well, very entertaining. Even Hollywood couldn't have expected him to be this good!

Today, however, Tibet and East Timor, among others, are the victims of geo-politics. While the West criticises the Burmese junta, they appear to be extremely wary of supporting freedom and the right to self determination for these

two nations. It makes sense moneywise -- their interests in China or Indonesia are too huge to ignore.

And if you think it was just the Americans, then think again. The Chinese too had abandoned the Communist Party of Thailand (the ranks of which were swollen by at least 3,000 students and activists who fought in the Oct 14, 1973 uprising and fled into the jungle after the Oct 6, 1976 crackdown) when it made more sense for them to befriend leading Thai right-wingers. Thus Kriengsak Chamanan (prime minister -- read another US-backed dictator -- from 1977 to 1980) was able to prop up the ailing Khmer Rouge.

As one rebel recalls: "We were bombed by government planes filled with Chinese fuel while Kriengsak was fed banquets in Peking."

Moving on to the second lesson -- and by no means the last -- the question of what Oct 14 actually stood for.

An awkward issue. Had the younger generation been taught to understand what Oct 14, 1973 was all about, there might well have been a few red faces among our elders. We are not talking here about the "right" versus the "left" perspectives of the events because even among those heroes who are still around, the view is somewhat murky.

Thirayuth Boonmee, one of the student leaders of Oct 14, 1973, defines the uprising as a struggle for "liberty". Outspoken lecturer in political science at Thammasat University, Kasien Techapeera, who was not a student leader, but refers to himself as part of the "Oct 14 generation" writes in the current issue of Art and Culture magazine that there is more to the spirit of the uprising than merely *la liberte*.

According to Kasien, the sanitised version of the spirit of Oct 14 was designed to suit the tastes of the 'generation next' -- the progeny of the middle classes and the "big capitalists". Kasien believes that today, the spirit of egalitarianism (social justice) and fraternity (nationalism and anti global-capitalism) is too bitter a pill for today's society to swallow.

Let's leave it to the living heroes to debate.

But can we really believe that every single person involved (many say there were as many as 500,000 individuals at the height of the protests) had the same ideology? Or was the lowest common denominator nothing but angst?

Let us consider what Charnvit Kasetsiri, a prominent historian and former rector of Thammasat University wrote about one Oct 14 martyr, Jira Bunmak. Charnvit referred to the late Jira as "among the fallen heroes who deserves to have his name inscribed in the pages of Siam's political history".

"Jira Bunmak, a graduate of the Prasanmit College of Education, was studying for his MA at NIDA. On Oct 14, he went out with his son to buy some toys, clothes, and food... came home and bathed the child... and listened to the radio. As he listened, he grumbled over and over: 'It's not true, the Department of Public Relations is broadcasting distortions of the truth when they say that the kids are creating riots and breaking in to seize Chitlada Palace -- everyone reveres His Majesty deeply, so why would they seize Chitlada Palace? What they should seize is the Department itself...'

"So Jira got up, found his pants and put them on. When Jira arrived at his destination, he distributed oranges to the Changkon vocational school students, and urged them to not to go in, not to

make trouble with the soldiers, but rather to keep calm and eat the oranges first. He also asked them to give him their flag, and said he would go and talk to the troops himself...

"As he drew near, he called to them: 'Soldiers, don't shoot the schoolchildren! They have no weapons! They are Thai like you! Thai soldiers should keep calm! Trust me!' But even as he spoke, the soldiers prepared to fire.

"Jira continued forward. The soldiers told him to halt, saying that if he advanced they would shoot. But Jira strode on, calling out 'Be calm, don't harm the kids or me. I'm here with good intentions and in peace.'

"With that, he took some oranges out of his bag and held them out for all to see, and then made as if about to throw them to the troops, calling out: 'Be calm, keep calm, we can sort things out if we talk ... have some oranges and you'll feel relaxed.' Then he threw the oranges towards the soldiers. At that moment the M-16 automatic rifle roared, and Jira fell to the ground. His legs twitched three times, then ceased to move. His blood spread around him."

What did Jira stand for?

Liberty? Egalitarianism? Anti-imperialism and capitalism?

All of the above? None of the above?

On second thoughts, do the young generation really care anyway?

BY PRAVIT ROJANAPHRUK

The Nation

Headlines

PAGE ONE COMMENT: Memorial to the October martyrs

IN the past 25 years, historical discourse of the significance of Oct 14, 1973, has taken different forms and shapes. Some have argued at length that it was the struggle of the idealism of freedom and democracy, while others have said the event was larger than life with ramifications for everything the Thais have done or achieved since then.

Whatever it is, the event has yet to receive a fair and accurate recount of history and analysis. There still are missing links, missing persons, missing explanations. This was a real event -- not a myth or a legend. It seems that everybody, including those who experienced it, has his or her own tale to tell. Some tell the story as it was, while others embellish with heroes or heroines like themselves in the act.

But so far, most of the accounts have come from one side -- the victims of military suppression and the bravehearts. But has anyone heard any repentance from the other side? In fact, attempts have been made repeatedly to rewrite the history of Oct 14. Those who ordered and were involved in the mass massacre on Rajdermnern Avenue survived and went unpunished. Year after year, they spill out their own version of history.

After a quarter of a century, a comprehensive picture of what happened on that fateful Sunday morning has yet to emerge -- so that future generations can learn from this tumultuous experience. Few accounts have touched on the sheer courage and convergence of aspirations and determination, as never seen before, that led to the dramatic confrontation between the civilians and the military. Its like has never be repeated -- not in the Oct 6, 1976, or the May 22, 1992, incidents.

Beyond Thailand, it was a significant chapter in the political history of the region. Thailand was the first Southeast Asian country to experience people power -- which succeeded in purging the military dictatorship -- when half a million unarmed civilians -- except for the vocational student units with pipes and Molotov cocktails -- fought with heavily armed security forces. No one thought at that time that people power could bring

massive transformation to the political landscape in this region. Or that it would become the most important factor in altering the political landscape throughout the world. The 1986 Philippine and May 1998 Indonesian revolutions are cases in point.

A monument at Khok Wua Intersection, which will be inaugurated Wednesday, to commemorate the deceased has been completed after years of wrangling. Its high pyramid shape is inscribed with names of the day's heroes and heroines. For some, that would be an appropriate way to put to rest the sacrificed souls. However, for others, especially those families whose loved ones are still unaccounted for, it is just a beginning as they will continue to search for their whereabouts. For one thing, the monument will certainly remind us and future generations of what happened that weekend and the consequences thereafter.

No matter who might further describe and interpret that Oct 14 in the months and years to come, to our minds it is still the most important political event in Thai history of the 20th Century. When the country transformed from absolute monarchy in 1932, considered by many as the greatest event, only a few groups of Thai people benefitted. But the Oct 14 incident has touched every Thai. This popular uprising by people from all walks of life helped create democracy by overthrowing a dictatorship.

In addition, the call for a new constitution, which triggered the revolution 25 years ago, has finally been fulfilled. Last year, a people's constitution was brought into force with contributions from everyone and without a single shot being fired. Thailand has indeed come a long way.

It has confirmed the dictum that the people are the ultimate source of power. In the final analysis, people need governments, but not as much as governments need people.

The Nation

Politics

Pain mingles with pride for Prapat

TWENTY-FIVE years ago today (Wednesday), Prapat sae Chua "walked tall" into modern Thai history.

The picture of the young, skinny man wielding just a piece of wood and solely confronting heavily-armed soldiers in front of the Royal Hotel on the Rajdamnoen Avenue became a most captivating symbol of the bloody pro-democracy uprising in October 1973.

Prapat became a hero. People called him "Walking Tall" man, after a popular western movie. His historic picture was re-published hundreds of times.

But the pain was as overwhelming as pride.

"After the event, there were times I wished I had just died," he told The Nation in an interview Tuesday. "Every time I closed my eyes, I saw people who were real heroes die in front of me. And all my life I can never forget the picture of vocational college students who died using their bodies as shields for other university students."

Prapat took part in protests at the Thammasat University in the days leading to the fateful Oct 14. Deprived of sleep, he went back to his dormitory at the Kasetsart University.

On the morning of Oct 14, he was told that fighting had erupted on Rajdamnoen and rushed to the avenue.

"Soldiers were firing -- machine-guns and tear-gas. Students fell. Those who didn't cried or screamed. Everybody went mad. Everybody was ready to die. Seeing and hearing all that, I did what I did," Prapat said.

"We confronted them. We yelled at them not to come any further. But they kept firing, into the air or the ground, so I picked up that piece of wood and ran toward them. The soldiers continued to close in and they shot me in the leg and hip. I was taken to the Siriraj Hospital."

Prapat now has a fairly happy life, married with four children. He owns orange plantations in Lampang and always re-tells the Oct 14 story to the kids.

"I want to teach them to learn to sacrifice for others, in

their own way. Times have changed and going out on the streets is not the only way to fight," he said.

Is he satisfied with the political development since that day?

"We are an open society. It's satisfactory to a certain level. Of course, there's still disparity and many politicians are corrupt, but had it not been for Oct 14, we would have been like Burma nowadays," he said.

DEMOCRACY lovers continued to converge at Sanam Luang, as the commemoration marking the 25th anniversary of the Oct 14, 1973, revolution entered its forth day Tuesday. Around 3,000 people attended, sharing old memories and learning new facts.

Amongst the crowd Tuesday was Interior Minister Sanan Kachornprasart who came with an entourage of more than a dozen people, including police officers. Sanan signed a petition calling for the adoption of Oct 14 as the Day of Rights and Freedom of the People. He also met Saovane Limmanont, a former student leader-turned-business executive.

Saovane recalled that 25 years ago, she was just 22 years old, a senior law student at Thammasat University. That day, she was at the Democracy Monument with huge crowds surrounding her and listening to her, and other student leaders, attack the government. The masses were calling for the unconditional release of the 13 students and activists who had called for a new constitution and were subsequently arrested.

Tuesday she chatted with old friends and new.

"I realised that quite a few youngsters did not know what October 14 was all about," Saovane explained. "This alarmed me and led me to the conclusion that a proper record of the past is needed."

The former student leader added that this is not a matter of opening old wounds but for the proper understanding by the younger generations.

"There was never a time when people did not win a struggle without paying a price in terms of flesh and blood. I hope that by knowing about such history, people will be determined to find a peaceful way of resolving conflicts in the future."

Saovanee also added that there is a need to erect a monument to martyrs as a symbol of the struggle. "This will provide people with knowledge. People can also be proud of themselves. They would know that once upon a time, the masses took to the streets and were ready to give up their lives to fight for a good cause," said Saovanee who had to flee to France in exile for 15 years, and only returned home to Thailand in 1990.

A group of students came to see Saovanee Tuesday to interview her and write a report about the tumultuous events.

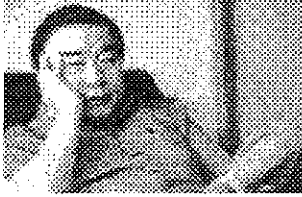
After a brief chat, Saovanee realised that the students had hardly any clue about what occurred back in Oct 1973. Saovanee then refused to continue answering questions but told the students first to do their homework by studying the various exhibition booths in Sanam Luang.

Meanwhile, the Crown property Bureau Tuesday signed a contract with the Oct 14 Foundation to lease the bureau's land at the Kok Wua intersection to build a memorial for the pro-democracy uprising.

BY PONGSAK BAI-NGERN and SUBHATRA
BHUMIPRABHAS

The Nation

Feature



Why The Martyrs Matter

THOSE who died in the many struggles for democracy in Thailand opened up avenues of advancement for their fellowmen, says Prida Tiasuwan to Duangporn Bodart.

SOME political activists who were involved in student uprising of Oct 14, 1973 student uprising incident seem to have shunned the so-called "October people". The reason? Because they believe that the ideology behind the revolution has simply vanished.

They have washed their hands of any activities related to the commemoration of the event due to an ideological crisis.

Amid the conflicts, however, there is at least one man who still firmly believes that the upheaval should be remembered -- and honoured -- as a turning point in Thailand's political development.

That man, albeit an active member of the campaign to construct of the Heroes' Sculpture -- the long-awaited monument to the martyrs of the uprising -- was not even actively involved in the events of 25 years ago.

As a matter of fact, in Sept 1973, 24-year-old Prida Tiasuwan, who had just earned a diploma from Ealing Technical College in England, was busy launching his jewellery firm. And he was deeply concerned that his business would become subject to military interference.

Much to his relief, the popular uprising of Oct 14 brought an end to a military authoritarian regime.

"I still feel very grateful to those who fought and died in Oct 14. It paved the way for my business to thrive. The whole country is indebted to the uprising," says the president of Pranda Jewelry which last year saw a turnover of a cool Bt3 billion.

Had the uprising not occurred, Prida thinks he would probably have ended up working and living abroad. And indeed, many well-educated people did just that: upped and left. What hope was there for them in Thailand? The beleaguered country was engulfed in fear of military power.

"At that time you had to acquire a military 'connection' if you wanted to do business. I didn't want to be in that situation. After you've lived in the West, even for just a few years, you think 'oh no I don't want to waste my life with such a system in place'."

Prida chose the jewellery trade because he wanted to create a new industry in Thailand which, at that time, was earning only minimal revenues from exports. Furthermore, the export market was more or less limited to agricultural produce. With the wealth of gemstones in Chanthaburi as raw material, he felt positive that there was potential to develop the market.

Twenty-five years ago, Prida had a staff of 10. He worked 17-hour days, arriving around 8am and heading back home at 1am. He did this every day for two years. Today he currently employs about 3,000 people and has four factories: in Bang Na, Nakhon Ratchasima, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Yet while he is the first to admit that he has devoted most of his time to building up his business, Prida has been busy trying to spread the message among the younger generation that that Oct 14 was important.

He is quick to point out that the fight against political corruption did not end there. He talks about the bloodbath of Oct 6, 1976 student uprising incident and the riots of May, 1992. To him, the events cannot be separated; they are an entity.

Given the crucial political changes that resulted from all three events, Prida is deeply disappointed that society has not done anything concrete for the martyrs. This, in his view, is particularly true in the case of the '73 uprising.

He acknowledges that there are those who still do faithfully commemorate the event each year. Sadly, the number is declining. Worse still, fewer and fewer people truly understand why the events occurred.

As a member of the committee organising the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Oct 14

uprising, Prida is determined to do everything he can to prevent the event being erased from memory.

"People should bear in mind that thanks to that first uprising, they are now able to openly criticise the government. We have come a long way in achieving freedom of expression. That's why we have to recognise the people who made it all possible," he says.

Prida ensures that he is abreast of political developments. After the May '92 riots, he became a member of the Businessmen for Democracy Club.

Yet despite the "business tycoon" face he chooses to wear, Prida has played a key role towards "democratising" Thailand. Although he refuses to be recognised as a "spearhead", he admits that he raised the idea of pushing for a brand new constitution with former prime minister Anand Panyarachun.

"Over the past two or three years, I have been quite actively involved," he says modestly.

He is adamant that he doesn't want -- or need -- recognition or a title, "I just do what I can [to help in political activities]".

Like other middle-class people, Prida is hopeful that the new charter will gradually eradicate gutter politics and decentralise the power structure.

"Nothing can be changed in one day. Our political system will be cleaner with the new Constitution. A few years ago, I was pessimistic, but now I believe that Thailand will have a better future."

But there is one thing that constantly worries Prida -- the education system and the paucity of education opportunities in both urban and rural areas.

"There are huge gaps in education. This really upsets me. The economic crisis over the past 18 months indicates that our system has failed."

Prida initially wanted his two children to be educated at a Thai school. He ended up so disgusted with the system that he finally decided to send his son to a boarding school in England. His daughter attended an international school in Bangkok.

He says he can personally offer no solutions to the

problem but hopes that the new Constitution will eventually lead to the withdrawal of the out-dated "learning by rote". Politicians holding educational portfolios, he says, will sooner or later be forced to focus on improving the system.

Despite his busy socio-political schedule, Prida is careful to ensure that he never overlooks the well-being of his employees. As part of the company's fringe benefits, the firm provides dormitories and child-care centres.

"The jewellery business does not only generate employment opportunities, it also creates skilled workers. We should treat them well and provide them with a good environment. Otherwise they will search for greener pastures," he says.

Prida's philosophy is sound. Many lost their lives in the fight for freedom and democracy. "I owe my success to them," he says firmly.

The Nation

Headlines

It's no longer black and white

THE legacy left behind by the fallen heroes of Oct 14, 1973, was summed up on Wednesday by a writer attending a public gathering on Wednesday to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the pro-democracy uprising: "We are no longer a black and white society".

Wat Wallayangkoon thinks of October 1973 as a watershed, which would in years to come pull Thailand out of the polarisation between dictatorial powers-that-be and place the country in another complex situation where "good" mingles with "evil".

"The problems we now confront are not black or white but come from all directions, both economically and socially. The solutions depend on our ability to think instead of trying to use physical force," the writer said.

"The younger generations will have a hard time in spotting the real enemies. This is because the enemies are elusive and sometimes hidden in corners. They may no longer be sitting in Government House or commanding the military tanks but they may be lurking inside the television monitor. They may make you want to get rid of you the trousers you're wearing for a new pair of jeans."

The thousands who gathered on Wednesday at Khwok Wua Intersection to remember the Oct 14 heroes did not experience sharp ideological contrasts like people did in the past. They now live in a society where freedom has flourished, disparity is a yawning gap and fierce competition has sapped the spirit from sacrificing for others.

In other words, the Oct 14 heroes gave the younger generation a great opportunity to shape their futures and learn that the new task is no less difficult.

on Wednesday was a day for reflection and a display of deep gratitude.

Wreaths were laid at the newly-built monument at Khok Wua Intersection by politicians, non-governmental organisations, the public and relatives all day. Inside Thammasat University, seminars, concerts and exhibitions marked the week-long celebration.

"We have waited 25 years. Today we are grateful to let you, the fallen heroes, know that we have accomplished the work [of building the monument]. We have looked after your families," activists announced.

Phibhop Dhongchai, representing the various movements, said: "Today we have finally secured a place in history for the people's struggle. We hope we shall also be able to secure a place for the people who struggled on Oct 6, 1976, as well as May 1992."

At night, the gathering of 10,000 people at Sanam Luang concluded the commemoration by lighting candles in remembrance of the fallen heroes.

"Today, people who are here are wondering who we should struggle against. Things are not as clear cut as before," said Nisanard Yothasmuta, a former activist who is now a banking executive. "It's no longer sufficient to think we can solve the problem by removing bad politicians. We must understand the problem and its structure on our own."

Artists, meanwhile, ponder the influence of their work as compared to the 1970s.

Twenty five years on "Wannakam Phua Cheevit", or literature influenced by social realism, has lost its power. The complexities of socio-economic problems have left the people, including the writers, stranded. However, literature of this kind has not died just yet, Wat said.

"As long as our society is plagued with problems, literature for life is not going to die," said Wat at a symposium on the "Twenty Five Years of Oct 14 Uprising" held on Wednesday at Sanam Luang.

Today, however, the art for life is becoming an art for social transformation. At the same time, art for life is finding itself inept in expressing the society's complexities.

"There may be more liberty and civil rights but artist have to deal with a more complex situation facing the society. It's no longer a matter of black and white because we have to also struggle with the enemy within us," said Paisarn Plienbangchang. "It is not for the people to understand structural problems in Thailand and in the world. We can at least say that October 1973 has raised many relevant issues."

Singer, Eiaw na Parnnan, said it was difficult to attack evils these days through music because even bad politicians have a clean image. "Crooks can wear suits and loot the country legally."

Eiaw said he was now trying to convey that a less consumeristic and a more simplistic lifestyle was a solution toward the present social ills.

Prinya Thaewanarumitkul, a law lecturer at Thammasat University, agrees that challenges today are more complex.

"We need a more accountable form of democracy where the powers-that-be can be scrutinised. We all need a democracy

which is more transparent. We must forge a more participatory society, a civil society where people from different walks of life have a role to play in solving the problems."

Joining the heroes' relatives to pay their respects were 50 politicians from various parties. Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, along with survivors of the revolt, gave alms to monks at Thammasat University.

BY FOCUS REPORTERS

The Nation

Politics

Books on key Thai history

SECONDARY school history books relating to the Oct 14, 1973 revolution and the Seri Thai movement have been completed, poet Naowarat Pongpaibul revealed during the Oct 14 remembrance on Wednesday.

He said the two books will be part of the school curriculum throughout the country.

A committee oversaw the preparation of the two books, and included prominent academics such as Charnvit Kasetsiri, Nithi Eausriwong, and Kasem Sirisamphan.

Naowarat said they have ensured the readability and simplicity of the texts which detail the heroic deeds of the Seri Thai underground movement in their fight against Japanese occupation during World War II, and the Oct 14 revolution.

Naowarat said the compilation and editing of the two books took one year. Information from various government agencies has been used comparatively with other available sources.

"The content will be light and the language easy to understand," he said. The books, which are now being printed, will be available soon.

The Nation

Politics

Remembering the October Martyrs: Monday, Oct 15, 1973

ALL night long the high school children, college students and the people continue their mass vigilance at the Democracy Monument. The government's repeated warnings and threats have no effect.

On the contrary, a huge number of people continue to leave their homes and join the crowd. The government announces that all government offices and banks will be closed today in view of the emergency.

Students and people spend the whole night breaking into buildings, including the Phanfah headquarters of the Metropolitan Police and the Nanglerng police station, and burning them down.

Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, who resigned as prime minister but still holds the post of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, continues to suppress the people. He alleges that communist rebels have sent armed units in disguise to the capital to continue the struggle with the government.

The use of violent and brutal means -- deployment of tanks, helicopters, heavy field artillery and hundreds of soldiers and policemen -- leads to a rift within the Thanom-Praphat regime. Among those opposed to the policy of violent suppression are Army Commander Gen Krit Sivara and the top brass of the air force and the navy. These leaders force Thanom to quit his position as Supreme Commander and eventually persuade him, along with his deputy Praphat and his son, Narong, to leave the country.

By 6.40 pm, the crisis is suddenly over

when the announcement is made that the trio have gone abroad.

Among the young men and women who left their homes to participate in the historic changes wrought by the events of October 1973, there were some who never returned, some who returned maimed and disabled and others who came back with new sensibilities. During the Oct 14-15, no less than 77 people were killed and 857 wounded. And many were unaccounted for.

Among the fallen heroes, no one deserves more to have his name inscribed in the annals of Thai history than Jira Bunmak. When he was shot dead in front of the offices of the Department of Public Relations, his comrades-in-arms retrieved his body, and surrounded it with their own, some vowing revenge, some weeping, some prostrating themselves by the lifeless corpse. Then the body was wrapped in the national flag with garlands round the neck, and borne across Phra Pinklao Bridge to the Bang Khaek intersection across the Chao Phraya River in Thonburi for all the people to witness.

Editorial & Opinion

Oct 14 struggle must continue

The Oct 14 revolution 25 years ago helped give life to Thai democracy, yet the true fruits of democracy still elude us, writes Pravit Rojanaphruk.

AS A result of the Oct 14, 1973 revolution, the Oct 6, 1976 incident, and the May 1992 struggle, Thais have come to enjoy unprecedented liberty and democracy -- at least constitutionally speaking. It is questionable, however, that there now exists equality in Thai society. On the contrary, the income gap, and the gap of opportunity, has widened significantly.

On Wednesday, many commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Oct 14 revolution in which students and citizens were able to overthrow a dictatorship for the first time. We should bear in mind, however, that there's still much to be done. Corruption is still rampant, more people are unemployed, the economy is in ruins as is the environment.

But that's not all.

Ahead lies another challenge, a challenge for us all to grasp -- the broader meaning of liberty and democracy. Unless we do so, we will not see Thailand become a more equitable society. It also means that we cannot expect to fully understand some of the causes of the present economic crisis.

How can there be true liberty when most Thai children are taught from the cradle to adhere to the belief that making as much money as possible, and as quickly as possible, is the single most important goal in life? Most parents will only allow their

kids to study the arts, literature, music, or any other field of interest that is not connected to making mega bucks if, and only if, they believe they will not end up like Vincent Van Gogh.

Thailand has an excessive number of MBA graduates -- and an excessive number of unemployed MBA graduates since the economy hit the wall. Among these are people who could have the potential to become Thailand's Matisse, Picasso, Kurosawa, Tolstoy, Tagore, Bernstein, Bach or Lao Tzu. However it seems many only want to be the Thai George Soros. This is because most Thai kids are pressured into studying courses that promise instant and large monetary returns, and so all they do is dream about making lots of money.

How can there be real liberty when families, schools and society tell our children, implicitly or explicitly, that it is only through getting rich and flaunting wealth can one gain the respect of others. Such values lead to the superficial judgement of others' success in terms of monetary wealth, power and position. Little is asked about the joy of work and labour. The end becomes all powerful compared to the means, and it does not matter what means one employs to attain the end.

It's hard to conceive of the loss in monetary terms because it's beyond our ability to quantify. For decades now, society has lost a lot of benefit from people who could otherwise have developed to the full extent of their humanity and love. Such a lack of liberty is also related to a speculative economy and conspicuous consumption. It's thus related to the current economic crisis.

Therefore we must try to create and nurture a society that respects the differences of values, views and goals in life. Sadly, in Thursday's Thailand, to be

poor is a fate worse than death. Despite deep Buddhist traditions, the virtue of voluntary poverty and frugality is almost alien to Thai youth, and adults.

The constitution, no matter how progressive, can not address the lack of greater liberty in this regard. It is up to every single Thai to do something about it through their daily life. And how can there be genuine democracy when families, companies and organisations nationwide are run in a dictatorial fashion?

Indeed democracy must be understood in its broader meanings. Democracy is not just about election and party politics. It's not just about votes either. We must make democracy part of our daily life.

Is it not that Thai society is at the mercy of the few individuals who control the Bank of Thailand, and who fought and failed in the disastrous defence of the baht last year. Between November 1996 and May 1997, the Bank of Thailand bet and lost almost US\$40 billion in its foreign exchange reserves to defend the currency peg system. Surely things may have been better if other less-senior officials at the Bank of Thailand, our central bank, were better informed and had greater role to play, democratically.

The same could be said when it comes to many of the now-defunct financial institutions. How much did the middle-level staff know of the illicit, if not hastily conceived, wheeling and dealing? How much say do these middle- and entry-level workers have in criticising and counter balancing the whims of their bosses?

Of course, the bosses would tell everyone that private-enterprise does not have to be a democracy. But when bankruptcies and unpaid debt occurs, they tell us that the democratically-elected government must help them, and with taxpayers

money too.

The lack of democracy in the workplace can be better understood when we look back at how schools, universities and families are run. People like Saeksan Prasertkul, a former student leader of the Oct 14, 1973 revolution who is now a political science lecturer at Thammasat University, complains that kids do not know how to exercise their liberty in the class room.

"I ask students every time I give a lecture whether anyone has a question they want to ask or if they want to debate some points they disagree with. But none of my students exercises this liberty," said Saeksan in a recent interview with Matichon daily newspaper.

Surely Saeksan is not the first -- nor will he be the last -- to complain. For decades, schools and families have used authority and force, not reason, understanding and love, to raise and educate children.

Given this situation, what hope is there for genuine democracy?

Without broader understanding, and existence, of greater liberty and democracy, what hope is there for social equality?

Indeed, what hope is there for Thai society?

Politics

Push to start planning for anniversary of uprising

MUKDAWAN SAKBOON

The Nation

THE People of October Network has a whole year to plan activities to commemorate the silver anniversary of the 1973 student uprising, but one of its leading members suggested the network begin its mission now so it can be integrated with political reform efforts now underway.

"The 25-year *Sibsee Tula* (Oct 14) Forum," said Theerayuth Boonme, who had a leading role in the historical event, "must be used as a national stage for the general public, academics, politicians, and non-governmental organisations to discuss all aspects of political reform and the crises the country now faces".

Such discussion should be maintained until October next year, said Theerayuth, a researcher at Thammasat University's Thaikadi Research Institute who was speaking on Tuesday.

The former student activist told a packed auditorium at the university, the scene of the 1973 student uprising, that the network's members and Thais in general should make politics a crucial part of their lives and continue the push for political reform.

Even though the new constitution incorporates several monitoring mechanisms to ensure the proper use of power, it is still too early to hope that the new basic law will lead to a sudden change in the structure of political power, Theerayuth said.

The political parties to emerge after the next general election, expected in March, will still represent the capital or influential groups, he said.

"This society's mission is to bridge politics at the top, which is played by a few, with that at the bottom, or people's politics," Theerayuth said.

Regardless of their social and economic status, people should be provided with equal space in expressing their opinion, he said.

People should be made to be well aware of their rights, as if this was an integral part of their lives, something which has yet to be achieved after more than 20 years of democracy development, he said.

"Culturally, Thais are not used to [exercising] power, but rather to surrendering to those who have acquired power, regardless of the means," he said.

"We cannot say that democracy is completely developed unless people fully realise how important it is to protect and properly exercise their rights," Theerayuth said.