

COMMENT / OCTOBER 14, 1973

There are tasks yet unrealised

Despite the monuments and all the grand talk, true democracy, equality in all its manifestations for all, continues to elude Thailand. Progress is being made, but it demands relentless endeavour.

Thirayuth Boonmi

For those of us who took part in the October 14, 1973 uprising, the wings of time have taken us through life more quickly than expected. My friends and I have actually been involved in political activities since high school. We have spent more than 30 years, more than half our lives, fighting for society.

Half a life is no small amount of time for anyone. If it was the moon, it would have gone into eclipse. A tree would have grown tall and provide people with shade, its wood would have become strong but not yet have dried, although its branches may be beginning to bend towards the earth.

Even so, it seems the tasks of the October 14 generation have not yet been completed. In every branch of society I still see the October people working away.

Vittayakorn Chiangkoon is still a diligent academic, Pipob Thongchai is mixing it up with the NGOs, Dr Weng Tochirakarn is still fighting for democracy, Dr Vichai Chokeyivat is going

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strong in medical circles, Chai Rachavat still draws intense and sharp cartoons, Nga Caravan writes beautiful music, Seksan Prasertkul writes short stories crystalised from his life, Pratuang Aimcharoen paints paintings that reach deep into the soul of man, and Somkid Singsong went back to being a village headman who is serious about his work.

They still work as if they do not know weariness.

The architects and artists who created the October 14, 1973 memorial designed the top of the stupa as a crystal with a jagged edge as a reminder that the tasks undertaken for democracy by the October 14 generation and the Thai people are not yet complete.

It is not too difficult for artists to create symbols. They can shape the crystal into any form they like. But it is a difficult undertaking for thinkers and philosophers to explain the meaning of the unrealised democratic tasks and it might take them the rest of their lives to think about. And for the practitioners who bear the burden of realising these tasks, it will take even longer.

Looking back 25 years ago, the events surrounding October 14, 1973 amounted to a great social revolution that brought changes to all dimensions of Thai politics.

Firstly, it was a most important starting point. October 14 liberated Thais from the prison of fear of rule by dictatorship that had kept them down for so long.

This prison of dictatorship shackled Thais through all manner of power: raw dark power and the murder of political opponents, legal power through the use of Article 19, the hooligan and communist suppression laws, cultural power through images of public executions, and the presence of generals and field marshals at department stores.

The pressure of dictatorship undermines the human dignity of all Thais in every way. Even a sense of morality deteriorates. When a person is arrested, he may be rejected by his close friends and relatives, even by his parents or his children, for fear of the danger that may engulf them. Friends are suspicious, academics dare not express opinions for fear of the cloaked power of the Special Branch Police.

October 14 helped all Thais shake off this fear. They gained the confidence and courage to express their political rights and freedoms. Once clear of this culture of fear, the look of Thai politics changed at the most basic level.

From that day on, the Thai people used their rights and powers to

fight for a better life and a better society. No one could restrain them any longer.

Secondly, on another level, October 14 reduced the power of the armed forces and the civil service system. But it also created opportunities for privileged capital groups, monopoly and semi-monopoly business groups, influential local groups and politicians to take power under the parliamentary system. In the end it became *Thanatippatai* (democracy by money), but out of this came political reform and the drafting of a new constitution by the Constitution Drafting Assembly.

This showed October 14 was not the answer for everything. Both good and bad continued to occur. But realising their rights and freedoms in the power of the people, these same people will improve and build on the good.

Thirdly, October 14 changed the character of Thai society. Class and status has been undermined and equality is more respected. But this change has been slow in coming and has only become discernible very recently.

Fourthly, October 14 started a process of channeling the rebel or ideological culture of youth into social and cultural capital which brought about important change in Thailand. The October 14 generation in some cases have become the fuel for reform of the civil service in the provinces and in the cities.

Fifthly, the most interesting thing about October 14 is that it liberated both the business sector and the poor villagers from the rule of the dictators and the civil service. After October 14, workers and farmers held widespread strikes that no one had expected. After October 6, 1976, these movements turned into private development organisations, community development organisations, human rights organisations, and organisations representing the poor and the slum dwellers.

Villagers and the poor were on the fringes of society in the past. They had no place in society, no place to talk about or discuss their problems, no place where their existence and rights were acknowledged.

Sometimes the middle class and the villagers and the communities will cooperate as in the protests of May 1992 and to demand political reform. Sometimes they go their own way as in the case of their thinking on how to solve the current economic crisis. This cooperation and separation are key factors in determining the development of Thai politics and are worth watching closely.

I view the incomplete tasks of the fight for democracy on October

14, 1973 in three ways.

Firstly, the need to reform Thai society on a continuous basis.

The core of the importance of October 14 is the fight with the dictators for the rights and freedoms of the people. From another perspective, it is the historical opening for the people to take power and use it to determine their own fate.

But the people's use of this power has been slow in developing. It has mostly been in the shape of expressing opinions and dissatisfaction with various degradations in society. There has been insufficient use of these rights in daily life, in all areas.

In childhood, in school, at work, in birth, in old age, in sickness and in death, for children, for women, for the disabled, for the ill, and for the consumers of goods, services and cultural output, for the citizen who cannot avoid entering into contracts with a host of institutions, both state and private, to take out mortgages and loans, to buy a house - these rights are still inadequate. Citizen in a modern society experience health risks and accidents, and it is desirable that they have rights.

Thais are still in dire need of these rights. Not long ago I joined a seminar arranged by a consumer organisation and found that this work lacks personnel, resources and the accumulated knowledge needed to face up to the problems of a modern society. Society must contribute to these things.

In my view, recent Thai society can be divided into two phases: from October 14, 1973 to the drafting of the new charter by the Constitution Drafting Assembly, and the future which I see as becoming the second stage of reform, the reform of all aspects of Thai society.

The second task in the fight for democracy is the building of a truly democratic culture.

My students who have worked with development agencies and movements assisting the poor ask me about the declaration of October 14 as Rights and Freedom Day. They ask whose rights and freedoms.

My answer is that they are the rights and freedoms of every Thai.

On October 14, 1973 all Thais stood up to fight dictatorship. They may now be soldiers, policemen, journalists, politicians, rich businessmen or poor villagers, but all have a claim to the rights and freedoms fought for on October 14.

We cannot limit rights and freedoms to any particular group, such as journalists, academics, the poor or the rich. Everyone must work with a clear conscience, regardless of the nature of his thoughts.

This is the essence of democracy, the realisation that rights, freedoms and power belong to all. We must respect differences of opinion, we must exercise patience and sympathy when it comes to differences of thought, both our own and those of others. There should be nothing which encourages us to deprive others of their rights and freedoms, regardless of belief or level of education.

There is no guru in the people's fight - not Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Karl Marx or Joseph Stalin. There is no prophet in this fight, there are only differences of duty and responsibility. The building of a truly democratic culture in our country is still a distant goal.

The third of these tasks is the securing of justice and goodness in society.

We all know man does not exist just to exercise his individual rights and freedoms. Human existence should be about justice, goodness in society and beauty in culture. At this point we are getting deep into philosophy because justice, goodness and beauty all involve differences of opinion.

Thai music is appreciated by the older generation but is seen as out of fashion by the young. Picasso's paintings have deep meaning for the modern generation but are seen as weird by those older.

There are vested interests in which the conflict is much more violent, such as logging, road building and the electric train project. Some feel these constitute progress, others see them as destroying the environment, the forests, the earth.

There are no clear and definite answers to these questions philosophically, but in society we can accommodate them because society has to move forward.

I feel we must all develop our own conscience to be clear in our soul. What do we see clearly and believe to be right and beautiful? We have to fight for these things and only criticise differences of opinion based on fact. Society is the final judge.

This is the reason I stress the need to strengthen society. Communities must be strong. And making society strong requires tools such as public hearings, making things public, campaigning to solve the problems arising out of differences of opinion so

matters are decided peacefully by the majority.

The conclusions to my mind are many and I call on everyone to help nurture the following standards in society:

- * A good and sufficient standard of living for the people.
- * Social justice and the fight for those less privileged than ourselves.
- * Empowering the people at all levels, from the community up through to the national level. Controlling and checking capital in areas where it may destroy our culture or create serious problems for society.
- * Opposing development that stresses growth without any concern for the world environment, humanity's condition or local cultures.
- * Complementing the power, knowledge and intellect of people, whether through *Thammarat* (dharma state) or through a strong society.

There is still hope for the future of our country. The economic crisis will not destroy Thailand. Even countries which have suffered religious or race conflicts over 20 or even 30 years have still manage to maintain their nationhood.

But the future of the Thai people remains gloomy because of the burden of our foreign and domestic debt. This is a burden we must shoulder for decades to come. Poverty, resignation and uncertainty all are important factors in the lives of Thai people.

The October 14 generation still has the task of fighting to resolve these problems.

My last thought for the October 14 generation: Your fight is comparable to your lives.

Between 1973 and 1981 you were young, hot-blooded and fired up with belief.

Between 1982 and 1992, you were middle-aged and so built a foundation for your families and set a path for their lives, or looked for new ways to fight. When faced with the old task, opposing dictatorship, you united in May 1992 and for the drafting of a new constitution.

From 1997 on has been like the last period of your lives. You have become a tall tree offering shade and producing saplings and solid

wood that will serve as your heritage in the world.

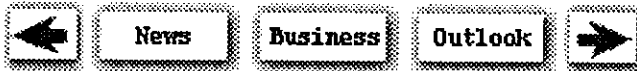
I would like to see this October 14 generation build something permanent for the Thai people.

It could be an ideology or a social mechanism, an institution such as law, or an organisation set up under the law or the constitution. In other words, reform the political, legal and civil service systems into something which is efficient, good and just, and responds to the problems of the people.

Having a sound structure with strong social mechanisms offers the people a guarantee and stimulates them to use their power. When the people exercise power, the country will move in a truly creative direction.

To my thinking, the real task of October 14, 1973 is bringing an end to all the tasks undertaken by the October 14 generation and turning them into the permanent endeavours of all the Thai people.

*** Thirayuth Boonmi was a key figure in the October 14, 1973 uprising. He was one of the 13 people arrested by the military junta for demanding a constitution. Their arrest touched off widespread protests that culminated in the overthrow of the Thanom-Prapass regime. Mr Thirayuth today is a lecturer with Thammasat University's Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology.**



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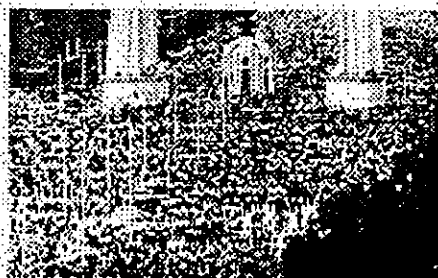
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The fight continues



OCTOMER 14 UPRISING: Just as the battle for democracy goes on, so too does the struggle to cope with the mental and physical scars inflicted on so many people 25 years ago today

The October 14 uprising marked a turning point in Thailand's political history. After decades of continuous dictatorship, hundreds of thousands Thais took to the street for the first time, demanding freedom and social equality.

For the first time in the Thai history, the people's power prevailed. The military regime was toppled. Yet, the crackdown on unarmed protesters left seventy-seven people dead and more than eight hundred people wounded.

For these people - students, housewives, traders - ordinary people from all walks of life - the transformation in their personal lives was even more radical. Some never returned home to their families. Others were wounded and broken and remain so to this day.

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It is easy for those not personally touched by the uprising to let the grandeur of the event obscure the personal tragedies of the people involved.

How many mothers still mourn their fallen sons 25 years after they failed to return home for dinner? How many people who were disabled now grit their teeth and wonder how things may have turned out differently? How many husbands and wives sob every time they recall their loved ones who disappeared into history? These unsung heroes quietly tend the scars of the event to this day and for many there is no sign the suffering will end soon.

Mr Surachai Thanomphanrak, 42

by Atiya Achakulwisut

Where the bullets came from, he had no idea, but they lodged where they could hurt him most - in his spine. On that afternoon, Surachai Thanomphanrak, 42, fell down in the street, never to stand again.

"The bullets hit both my lungs shattering the upper part of my backbones. It didn't hurt. I felt kind of numb. I fell down and I could see blood coming from my arms.

"Even at that time, I was glad I had a part in the event. I thought, well, the wound will heal in no time," recalled Mr Surachai.

But that was not to be the case. The damage was near fatal. Part of Mr Surachai's spine was shattered. It was like a major power supply being cut off. Mr Surachai was almost completely paralyzed - a fate more terrible than his worst nightmare.

"I never imagined I would be handicapped," he said, asking his helper to move his legs to a more comfortable position.

Then a high school student at Amnuay Silp school, Mr Surachai joined the protest because he had been frustrated by the corrupt, overbearing bureaucracy.

"Policemen often came by to racketeer my parents who were traders. Ordinary people were always scolded when doing



Surachai Thanomphanrak never imagined he would be permanently handicapped when he was shot in the back.

business at a government office. It was worse for Chinese descendants like me. They would make a fool of us, calling us swine or stupid."

Mr Surachai had joined the protest on October 12. He went out again on October 14 because the radio announced the demonstrators beat up the police.

He wondered how that could be true since the protesters were unarmed. Curiosity got the better of him and later that morning, Mr Surachai and a friend set out to see what was really was going on.

Ratchadamneon Road and Sanam Luang were near chaos when he arrived. He joined a group of protesters along the Pin Klao bridge, near Sanam Luang. Opposite was a group of armed soldiers.

A little later, Mr Surachai was about to leave the protest site to go into Thammasat University when he heard a round of bullets being fired. And he fell down.

"The next thing I remembered was laying on a stretcher, staring at the sign Siriraj Hospital. Then, everything went black," he said, pausing to gather his breath.

The gap in his spinal cord makes the mere act of speaking so exhausting he can easily pass out.

He did not leave the hospital until three years later. The injuries were so serious doctors did not give him much hope. When His Majesty the King went to visit him in the intensive care unit and asked about his condition, the doctor said he was unlikely to pull through.

The bad news was a blessing in disguise for Mr Surachai, since Her Majesty the Queen took him on as a royal sponsorship patient.

"While I was in hospital, the suffering was almost unbearable. The doctors had to puncture my chest to drain blood and I was on a respirator. I could not breathe by myself. I could not talk or communicate. But even then, I did not know I would be permanently handicapped."

Then one day, he overheard a doctor talking about him and the reality sank in. Gone were the dreams of becoming a good bureaucrat.

That was the first time he cried.

Mr Surachai left hospital in a wheelchair, something he would spend years getting used to. He lost control of and needed assistance with almost every bodily function.

He had to learn to be spoon-fed when hungry, to be moved in his sleep and to be helped in the bathroom. In essence, he had to learn to live again in a locked-up body over which he had no control. A body that would not respond to his needs.

Mr Surachai can breathe by himself, with an effort, thanks to the help of a diaphragm. He has to wear a tight corset, against which he can push for breath.

So has he ever regretted going out that day 25 years ago?

"My deepest sorrow is for my mom. It was tougher on her. I am her only son. She had high hopes for me. She was devastated," Mr Surachai said.

He said his mother cared for him until she died. Despite her personal grief, she always encouraged him to fight on and not succumb to despair.

"At least you can keep me company and help me think things out," she often told him.

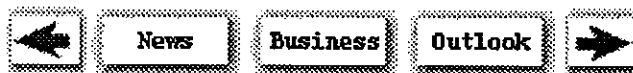
And what does he think of the significance of October 14 in the public mind? Mr Surachai shakes his head slowly and smiles.

"There is no recognition of the event unless October comes around. I have joined commemorations at Thammasat University many times but I don't know what to do. No-one knew me and it is not my business to go round telling people, hey, I was there. I was shot, too.

"I don't hold a grudge against anyone, not even the soldier who shot me. We both did what we had to do. I am not disappointed because I never expect anybody to help me. I am lucky to have support from my family.

"Don't pity me. But look at me as a reminder that once not so long ago, a generation of people gave their blood for democracy.

Don't take it for granted, simply enjoying yourselves in politicking and a game of greed. We are still here, watching and suffering in silence. We ain't dead yet."



OCTOBER UPRISING

Soldiers: It won't be repeated

But most are against heroes' monument

Wassana Nanuam

Soldiers say the 25th anniversary of the October 14, 1973 uprising, in which troops shot unarmed protesters, is a bitter memory and will never be repeated.

Officers say today's army has turned over a new leaf and shares the democratic ideals of those who brought down the military regime of Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapass Charusathiara. Soldiers will never turn their rifle sights on fellow Thais in the same way, they promised.

Senior officers said the army had done its best to shake off its notorious image as killers of the innocents. For years it had carried the emotional pain and guilt of upholding undemocratic military dictatorships.

The famous flickering black and white film footage of activists fleeing a hail of bullets on Ratchadamnoen Avenue was still a terrible reminder of the army's role in suppressing public aspirations.

"We hate being hated by people. This sentiment runs deep in their souls," said one officer, who like most of his colleagues did not want to be named.

New Army Commander-in-Chief Surayud Chulanont said uprisings like that in 1973 would never happen again since the

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military was no longer involved in politics.

Gen Surayud has himself given up his senate seat and has promised to avoid socialising with politicians. Army personnel have also been barred from commenting on politics. Views can only be given via spokesmen such as the army secretary and the directorate chiefs.

Looking back on 1973, officers said they were pleased the uprising had led to more democracy, but they do not cherish the memory of the bloodshed.

"The military is hurt every time events of this nature, be it the October 14 uprising or the May 1992 bloodshed, are commemorated or talked about," a lieutenant-general said.

Gen Chainarong Noonpakdee, the deputy supreme commander who was on the now-defunct National Peace-keeping Council accused of suppressing the 1992 activists, said what happened in 1973 "must be prevented at all costs".

However, he defended the army's handling of the uprising, saying there was no democracy in those days. The military must now adapt to the times, now that there was more democracy, and wash their hands of politics. Senior officers must adopt a lower profile.

Speaking about the Black May bloodbath, Gen Chainarong said: "I always regret the unfortunate event that occurred."

Army secretary Maj-Gen Pathompong Kesornsuk said the force would follow army chief Gen Surayud's stern warning to stay out of politics.

But in spite of the military's more democratic leanings most soldiers are upset to see the Heroes' Monument, honouring those who died in 1973, being built at Khok Wua intersection, off Ratchadamnoen Avenue. It was near here that many protesters were shot.

They see the monument as divisive and say it will generate further bitterness.

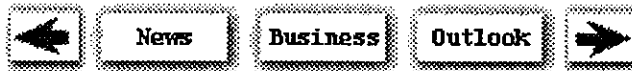
A 1996 Defence Ministry study carried out under Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh said the memorial should not be built because it would set in stone the army's role in suppressing democracy. It failed to take into account the fact that the army had moved on since 1973.

Many officers agreed there were better ways of expressing a love for democracy.

"We don't want the construction to go ahead. The site will just tear apart the soldiers' hearts," said Lt-Gen Lertrat Rattananavich, the assistant army chief-of-staff.

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Cheewin Chaitosa, died age 18

by Vasana Chinvarakorn

Cheewin's mother, Wilai Phantana, did not think that anything would happen to her peace-loving son.

Though exhausted from a long day's shopping in the city, Wilai Phantana's heart would jump for joy when the train pulled into Ayutthaya station and she saw her eldest boy waiting on the platform for her.

As the train came to a stop, Cheewin Chaitosa would rush to relieve his mother of her heavy packages. A conscientious boy, he wanted to help his poor mom in every possible way. The father had long gone, never sending the family of three children a single baht.

The Sunday afternoon ritual following Mrs Wilai's weekly shopping trips to Bangkok had always been a source of pleasure for both mother and child.

But the incident on October 14, 1973, also a Sunday, ended it forever.

On Saturday morning, Cheewin, then 18 and in his second year at a vocational college, said he wanted to join his friends to listen to a speech at Sanam Luang.

That was the last time she saw her son's round cheerful face.

"I didn't think at all that something terrible could happen to him," Mrs Wilai sobbed. "He was such a peace-loving kid, never got himself in a fight with anyone. I know vocational college students have a bad reputation for being aggressive types. But Cheewin was not one of those. That day he said he was going to demand democracy.

"He was always concerned about his mom. That's why every time I think of him, I am not able to hold back the tears."

According to later accounts, at 5 pm on October 14, Cheewin was in the middle of a crowd of hundreds of thousands of protesters marching on Ratchadamnoen Avenue. At the Phan Fa Bridge, he looked up at a helicopter hovering over them, when a shot struck and killed the teenager instantly.

"It was such a clean shot," said Mrs Wilai, a retired police officer. "The bullet shot right through his chin and out the back of the neck. There was no wound in the front."

Mrs Wilai learned of her son's death the following morning.

"They found my brother's Bangkok address in Cheewin's pocket. The first moment I heard the news, I simply collapsed.

"There was no train. I had to hire a taxi. At the hospital, there were all sorts of cries and whines. I looked everywhere for Cheewin. Finally, I found his body on the top of a pile. And I fainted."

Since then, Mrs Wilai has struggled to make ends meet on her 3,000-baht a month salary and raising her other two children, one of whom has been partially paralysed since birth.

The only form of compensation Mrs Wilai has received for the loss of her son is a meagre monthly subsidy from the "Fund for Victims".

"At first I got 400 baht. After 25 years, they have increased the rate for my family to 1,160 baht."

Not the activist type, Mrs Wilai said she has resigned herself to the fact that what happened may have been part of the karmic chain, and that one day those responsible for the mass killing will be punished.

"As a matter of fact, I was a classmate of (then prime minister) Tanom Kittikachorn's daughter, when they moved temporarily to Ayutthaya during World War Two. But most likely she won't be able to remember me, being in the elite circle and all."

Does Mrs Wilai think the sacrifice of her son's life for the cause of democracy was worth it?

"Personally, it is not, considering the current state of affairs, with politicians fighting for positions all the time. I wish they could realise that people died in the hope of bringing about freedom, not for particular families to get rich.

"I don't even know if I will ever live to see the completion of the monument."

For the past 25 years, Mrs Wilai has been holding a small Buddhist ceremony for her eldest son at a temple near her home. Living in Ayutthaya, she said it is hard for her to come all the way to Bangkok to join the other families who have lost their sons, daughters, fathers, brothers or sisters.

But she knows they must share similar painful memories.

As she does, every time she steps out of the train at Ayutthaya station, where her son is no longer waiting.

Sukij Thongprasoot, died when he was 18.

Nilubol Pornpitagpan

Time heals all wounds so the saying goes, but 25 years has past and still nothing can fill the empty hearts of Sam-ang and Samniang Thongprasoot who still mourn the death of their son, Sukij.



The loss of Sukij, "their good son," in the 1973 October Uprising, still leaves a vacant space in the two pensioners' minds. The pain might have subsided, but recollections of him still bring tears.

"I change the flower at his altar everyday," said Mrs Samniang, 74. Both the silver-haired Thongprasoots walk with difficulty due to poor health and Mrs Samniang needs a cane.

They lament the untimely death of their son, that came so soon. They regret not having the opportunity to see their boy grow up and become an artist. They long for the moments they shared together.

On October 14, as the demonstrators clashed with the military, news spread around Phasi Charoen that officers from Phasi Charoen police station had been called-in as reinforcements at the violent scene near the Chitralada Palace. Volunteers were urged to come forward to stop the police from moving in.

Sukij, 18, was not a keen political follower. But upon hearing the news, he joined in. He dropped home to tell his parents he would go out with friends. The van he took crashed with a truck. Sukij died on impact while some of his fellow travellers were injured.

"We just finished watching a comedy on TV. Then a man who knew my son rushed to our house to inform us of the bad news," said Mrs Samniang, tears filling her eyes as she recounted the event.

"I dared not look at his corpse. The sight terrified me.

"Sukit was such a good boy," sighed Mr Sam-ang. "We have three

sons and three daughters. Since we were very poor, Sukij, who is the fourth child, always wanted to give us some help. He tried to do something to gain some money to support us."

When he was only eight, Sukij used to catch fish in the nearby canal, to put extra food on the table. When he was in his teens, he worked with Piak Poster, painting movie posters, after school and would find jobs to do on school holidays. He also cast heads of the Buddha image to sell.

"His works were beautiful. He learned to do it by himself," said his proud father, who is 84.

"Our family is not interested in political movements. We just listened to the news on the radio," said Mrs Samniang. She used to work folding paper bags from newspaper for sale while her husband worked for the State Railway of Thailand.

"The first year I cried like crazy. Every time I thought of him, tears ran down my cheeks. My living sons and daughters had to talk me out of the sorrow," says Mrs Samniang.

Not all the neighbours showed sympathy to the family. Some said their son cause the disturbance. He should have left politics to adult hands.

The hands of the two Thongprasoot trembled as they wrote down their son's name on a mould made of earth prepared for them by the Committee Organising the 25th Anniversary of the October Uprising at the Pridi Banomyong Institute last week.

The terracotta plate when baked, will be placed on a permanent monument in memory of those who lost their lives during the uprising.

"I'm glad a monument for the dead will be constructed finally. I have been waiting for it for a long time. I'm afraid I may die before I see it completed. I'm 84 now. My days are numbered," said Mr Sam-ang.

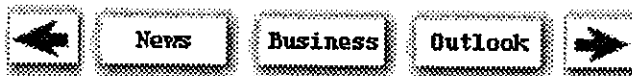
The family received 350 baht a month from a funds set up to *the fundthe Foundation to Help the Victims* allocate cash to the families of those who died in the political uprising. The amount was increased to 1,000 baht a few years ago.

At 74, Mrs Samniang still helps her youngest daughter who is a food vendor.

"My children all have their own family and children to take care of. They have to make ends meet while we have to make ours

meet. We can't rely on their financial aid."

Life may be difficult. But one enduring consolation for the two old-timers is the pride they have for their son. "We miss him. We are proud of him. He died for a courageous cause," said Mrs Sam-ang.



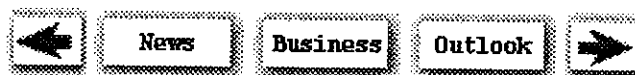
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OCTOBER UPRISING / POWERFUL FORCE BEHIND
THE DEMONSTRATION

Silent donors play major role in people's victory

*People who secretly donated cash and
essential items to the activists should be
remembered.*

Mongkol Bangprapa

If it weren't for the "silent donors," the struggle for Thailand's political liberation by the pro-democracy heroes of October 14, 1973, might have turned out differently and for the worse.

History seldom mentions the force who had secretly donated cash and essential items to the activists under the nose of the Thanom Kittikachorn-Prapass Charusathiara government.

The secret supplies mounted as the pro-democracy demonstrators intensified their campaign for the ouster of the ruling military regime.

On the threshold of one of history's most horrendous political upheavals, it took only one smallest move on the part of the activists seen by the ruling regime as an act of provocation to start what later developed into nothing short of a carnage.

The military government brutally cracked down on the activists

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whose only "crime" was to fight for social and political justice. The recorded casualties from the October 14 uprising were 77 dead and hundreds injured.

But victory was finally theirs. The activists succeeded in toppling the Thanom-Prapass regime and, without any more government obstruction, their campaign for democracy started to blossom.

The October 14 activists relied mostly on food and cash donations pouring in from supporters who preferred to remain anonymous for fear of government reprisals.

Their donations, in all shapes and forms, had been the lifelines of the anti-dictatorship campaign from its early days.

Sutham Saengprathum, who was secretary of a federation of university students at the height of the October 14 uprising, recalled the generosity of Sanam Luang vendors who gave away food and drinks to those protesting against a move to empower the justice minister to dismiss judges in early 1972.

On June 10, 1973, Sak Pasukniran, the then Ramkhamhaeng University rector, covered up the names of nine students who wrote books criticising Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn's administration in a bid to protect them.

When high-profile students sacrificed their tuition fees to help finance the pro-democracy movement, donations from anonymous supporters started piling up.

In the lead-up to the October 14 massacre, the donations were accepted in a more organised and systematic manner, Mr Sutham said.

During the bloody event, the demonstrators successfully pressed for the release of 13 detained student leaders, and shortly afterwards pressured Field Marshal Thanom to resign as prime minister.

Mr Sutham noted the amount of donations had peaked in a few months before and after the October uprising.

Many ordinary people who were keen to join the protest chose to do so discreetly and cautiously by giving food and financial donations to governing bodies of university students and their federation.

The late M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, a former premier and respected newspaper columnist, even wrote in his *Siam Rath* daily to help solicit the donations. He himself gave some 200,000 baht.

The cash donations totalled 23 million baht. The largest allocation from the fund - about three million baht - went to a project to promote democracy in Thailand.

Mr Sutham said only four million baht remained in the Student Federation of Thailand's coffers when he became its secretary-general. Its fund was later confiscated by the government.

He said state authorities had tried to tarnish the federation's name by playing up reports about an alleged misappropriation of the fund.

Mr Sutham, however, admitted a considerable portion had been swindled by a federation member who managed the fund.

In 1975, its deputy secretary-general Pinit Charusombat, now a deputy interior minister, sued the accused on the federation's behalf.

However, there was no trial since the court decided that the federation was not a juristic person, and hence not legally empowered to file a lawsuit.

The federation then amended its rules on fund spending to also require the secretary-general's approval for any disbursement.

State authorities had also made a false allegation that Ms Saowanee Limmanond, a federation executive, had pocketed the fund and left for France.

Mr Sutham explained that Ms Saowanee had no access to the federation's treasury, and that it was her father who sent her to France because he feared for her safety.

Mr Sutham said people had literally queued up to donate to the federation after Field Marshal Thanom's resignation and departure from Thailand.

"Thais are fond of heroes, who, in this case, were the activists. And their donations were their way of expressing just that," he said.

Chaiwat Suravichai, a former Chulalongkorn University student club chairman, said the donated money dwindled quickly and by the time another student uprising erupted on October 6, 1976, only four million baht was left in the federation's coffers.

What was left of the fund was finally seized by the Kriangsak

Chamanan government. It was not until 1989 that then prime minister Chatichai Choonhavan set aside a budget of equal sum for the building of a memorial to honour the pro-democracy activists.

A board appointed to oversee the memorial construction had asked that the government describe the budget as "the money returned from confiscation."

The amount plus interest totalling eight million baht has been managed by the October 14 Heroes Foundation chaired by Gotham Arya, now a member of the Election Commission of Thailand.

The foundation is jointly operated by representatives from the University Affairs Ministry and the Crown Property Bureau.

Another foundation was also set up by former premier Sanya Dharmasakdi using a separate chunk of donations raised during the October 14 event.

Aiming to financially assist relatives of dead victims as well as surviving activists of the uprising, the foundation was worth 32 million baht when it was created.

A start-off donation of six million baht kept by the federation constituted its core amount. Another 32-million-baht contribution from the Government Lottery Bureau and another four million baht from the state were later added to it.

The foundation, chaired by Plang Meejul, was later renamed with the words "October 14, 1973, victims" deleted. With the change, the foundation's objective was also altered to assist victims of disasters in general.

This has triggered a controversy. Critics say the foundation has failed to continue providing adequate support for the October 14 activists and their families.

Prapat Panyachartrak, who joined the October 14 demonstration when he was a student, accused the foundation of ignoring the activists' plight, saying those disabled in the event have had to endure hardship unassisted.

They planned to raise their complaint with the prime minister and the general public during celebrations organised at Thammasat University to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the October 14 uprising.

Chaiwat Suravichai, one of the organisers, said the foundation's

assistance had fallen short of the activists' need. But he urged all concerned to settle their problems through negotiations.



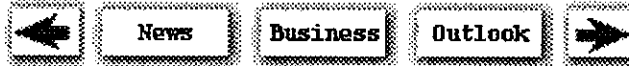
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OCTOBER UPRISING / DAY OF FREEDOM

A new meaning for a significant event

Activists try to assess its historical value

Onnucha Hutasingh

The 1973 October 14 uprising is to be given a whole new meaning. On its 25th anniversary this year, it will be remembered as the Day of Freedom.

Thirayuth Boonmi, the October 14 activist who gave the day a new definition, explained he wanted to break away from the conventional perception of the event which merely projects a single dimension of a particular chapter in history and the people involved.

The social scientist said he wished to bring out another facet of October 14 which should portray a broader section of society.

Prasarn Marukapithak, member of the October 14 celebration organising committee, described the new definition as an attempt to "assess" the historical value of the event.

He noted that unlike other landmark events such as the change of absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy marked on June 24, the October 14 event has been without a clear definition.

It was the day when students and pro-democracy organisations were brutally suppressed for trying to topple what they labelled as a dictatorial government.

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Their fight culminated in the fall of the Thanom Kittikachorn-Prapass Charusathiara regime.

People hold mixed views of the event, thought to be a horrid day by some and a day of delight by others.

But few rarely understand the unprecedented "thrust" of the popular uprising which has forever changed the face of national politics.

Mr Prasarn agreed that October 14 not only inspired freedom but also inspired people who were liberated from the hand of a dictatorial government to be braver in safeguarding their own rights.

"People's power grew from that day," he said, adding many civic groups were formed and the mass media enjoyed greater freedom of speech.

But he welcomed the idea of brainstorming to find a better-fitting definition for the important day.

The organising committee had been eager to invite world leaders and democracy advocates such as South African President Nelson Mandela and Korean President Kim Dae-Jung to its forum.

Budget constraints, however, forced the committee to scrap the plan which was expected to cost as much as 10 million baht.

Apart from the October remembrance activities, and the planned construction of the activist monument at Khok Wua intersection, various events have also been held with the aim of educating youngsters about the political turbulence of 1973.

Sila Komchai, an activist writer and organising committee member, said although more young people have been made aware of the event, its significance remains very much irrelevant to them because of the wide generation gap.

"The celebration is restricted to the October 14 generation of activists when in fact a much wider segment of society should be participating," he said.

One project after another was initiated to persuade more people to join the October-related activities in the hope of instilling a sense of belonging. But media publicity as well as the public response so far has been unsatisfactory.

Pornchai Viranarong, another organising committee executive, said the economic downturn might have diverted public attention

from the event.

He conceded communicating the October message to young people has been problematic.

Mr Pornchai said most university students he came across did not even stop to look at what activities his committee was organising.

Pipob Thongchai, Campaign for Democracy Committee secretary-general, blamed the failed activity target on a weak publicity campaign, adding the organising committee should expand its agenda to address more problems of social injustice and corruption.

There is friction among the host of organisers working for the October 14 cause.

It was reported many pro-democracy members were critical of the move to include respected figures - such as Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, former premier Anand Panyarachun and Dhanin Cheravanont, president of the Charoen Pokphand conglomerate - in the activist monument construction panel as a gesture of harmony between ordinary people and the business group.

But the opponents argued the presence of the businessman would paint an undesirable image of the activist heroes.

The organisers are trying their best to cement the cracks to prevent deeper divisions, one organising member said.

Prayong Lamyai, a northern NGO member, said the October 14 commemoration was confined to a particular group who had first-hand experience in leading a political crusade.

Because the event did not "accommodate" problems affecting people at large, only few share the October 14 sentiment.

The democracy that was the fruit of the October fighting was often used by the Bangkok middle class as a pretext to increase its negotiating power on different issues.

But such "power" has been left untapped by the poor and this explains why the greater population did not find any appeal in the event which to them is "meaningless".

Disagreeing with October 14 being branded as the Day of Freedom, Mr Prayong insisted the word had no place in Thai society as long as the people's rights were continually violated.

Nattavut Vatcharakuldilok, secretary of the October 14 Network,

said what happened 25 years ago was very distant to the new generation. This is partly why the October awareness campaign has been less than 50 percent successful.

The 1973 veteran activists must spearhead a democratic force and lead people in the right direction as they succeeded in doing so in their younger days.

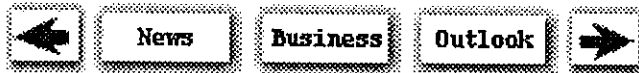
People must be better informed about the economic, social and global changes so that they would be "in firm control of their fate" and could defend themselves against any manipulation by the powers-that-be.

To Mr Thirayuth, though, it would be reward enough if veteran activists like himself could establish a link between the struggle faced by ordinary people and the October 14 quest for a freer existence.

But he admitted such a task was daunting.

"Over the last 25 years, what has been missing is a bridge connecting the past with the present. But this is too big a duty for the 1973 generation to carry alone," he said.

"If we can't find the key that will help us reach out to the next generation, then it is unfortunate that the glory of October 14 will fade away with time."



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OCTOBER UPRISING

Victims' kin demand damages

Amounts to be judged on case-by-case basis

Yuwadee Tunyasiri

Relatives of the October 14, 1973 massacre victims have issued a demand for retroactive compensation, complaining they have been neglected by the state for too long.

The relatives, represented by Thirayuth Boonmi, sought financial assistance from Prime Minister's Office Minister Supatra Masdit.

The demand came on the eve of the 25th anniversary of the student-led popular uprising that brought down military dictatorship in Thailand. Scores of people were killed during the rebellion.

The relatives contended they have received little help from the succession of governments. To survive, they urgently needed the means in terms of back compensation payment.

The relatives said the amounts to be paid should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Each family should be given 100,000 baht, and those injured in the bloody event who are still able to sustain their lives, 50,000 baht each.

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The families of the deceased October 14 activists and the able-bodied activists who are still alive should be paid monthly compensation equivalent to the minimum wage.

The veteran activists who ended up mentally deranged should each be compensated 10,000 baht a month.

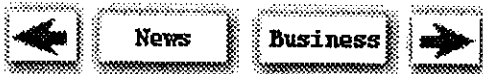
The relatives also wanted the government to fork out 20,000 baht to cover the cost per funeral for the surviving activists when they die.

The government has been pressed to conduct a survey of the October victims so appropriate welfare assistance could be offered.

Prapat Panyachatraksa, executive of the October 14 Heroes' Relatives Committee, said he was satisfied with Khunying Supatra's pledge to care for the relatives and the veteran activists.

The minister said she would arrange for relatives to meet with officials of the October 14 Heroes' Relatives Foundation which the former accused of lacking openness in its operation.

Mr Prapat said the 60-million-baht foundation has been slow and inefficient in getting across help.



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