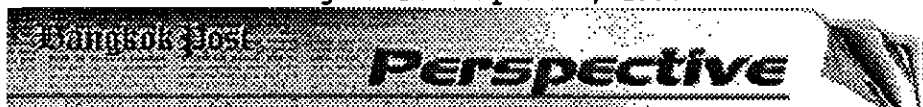


Bangkok Post April 6, 1997



**Front**

IRONY

# In memory of a memorial

*The October 14 memorial project has been passed from government to government for 24 years. It is ironic that a controversial Defence Ministry order could finally lead to another pledge to build a monument to the student martyrs*

**P**rime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh pledged to build a monument to the martyrs of the October 14 student uprising in 1973.

Democracy groups, however, have good reason to doubt that promise.

Twenty-four years have passed since the historic event, and the quest for a memorial has gone through many governments - all to no avail.

**Revived hopes:** Gen Chavalit revived the hopes of the families of the October 14 victims last Tuesday when he pledged to bring the long-delayed memorial project into existence during his term.

His promise was seen as an attempt to repair the damage wrought by his order in granting a pension to Col Narong Kittikachorn, a man accused of heading the suppression of the October 14 demonstrators.

The prime minister promised to appoint a committee

comprising representatives from state agencies, democracy organisations and the people to look for an appropriate location.

**Doubts:** But there are those who are taking the Prime Minister's promise with a grain of salt.

Weng Tojirakarn, chairman of the Confederation for Democracy, said his organisation had never trusted politicians.

The group, he said, would keep a close watch on Prime Minister Chavalit and make sure that he will fulfil his promise.

The skeptical response is not entirely surprising, since the memorial for the student martyrs has been around for a long time.

Let's review its drawn-out history.

**Round One - December 1974:** The Sanya Thammasak government decided on December 11, 1974 that a memorial for those who died during the protest be built at the Kawk Wua intersection on Ratchadamnoen Avenue.

**Round Two - August 1975:** The Kukrit Pramoj government decided to set up a committee to implement that resolution on August 5, 1975.

After five meetings, the committee came up with a 10-point proposal.

Finance Minister Boonchu Rojanastien reviewed the plan and agreed to all points bar one - He argued that the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) should meet the construction costs.

He did agree, however, that the Finance Ministry, having contacted and received the consent of the Crown Property Bureau (CPB), should buy the plot of land at the intersection for about three million baht.

At the end of the Kukrit government, the new finance minister, Mr Sawet Piampongsarn, submitted a proposal to Cabinet in a letter dated June 29, 1976 and undertook to send another letter to the CPB requesting to buy the land for 4 million baht.

A coup ended the Kukrit government.

**Round Three - October 1976:** Soon after the coup d'etat of October 6, 1976 the finance minister in the Thanin Kraivichian government, Mr Supat Suthatham, sent a letter to Cabinet suggesting the project be abandoned.

His suggestion was approved on December 14, 1976.

**Round 4 - March 1980 to August 1988:** The matter was put to rest during the years under the prime ministership of Gen Prem Tinsulanonda.

**Round Five - October 1989:** When Chatichai Choonhavan became prime minister in 1988, academics, students and heads of non-governmental organisations formed a committee to follow up on the construction of the October 14 Memorial.

The committee was set up on October 20, 1989 and chaired by Prof Rapi Sakrik, former rector of Kasetsart University.

The committee sent representatives to meet the prime minister on October 27, 1989 and received his assurances of cooperation.

On October 31, 1989, Cabinet decided to return money confiscated from the NSCT by the Kriangsak Chomanand government in 1977 (about four million baht) to the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) for use in further consultation with students.

On May 1, 1990, Cabinet decided to set up an official committee to be chaired by Prof Rapi. A division within the MUA served as secretariat.

**Round Six - August 1990:** The Rapi committee in August 1990 sought to rent land from the Crown Property Bureau (CPB) to build the memorial.

The CPB informed the committee that the land at Kawkwua intersection was now rented by Ratchadamnoen Stadium Company (RSC) which sub-leased it to the Lottery Sellers Association (LSA).

The CPB asked the committee to negotiate directly with the two organisations.

As a result of a preliminary negotiation, the RSC asked for time for the consideration of its board of directors and the LSA also revealed that they wanted to jointly use the land - even after the construction of the memorial.

Sensing that negotiations would lead nowhere, the MUA asked the CPB to mediate. In reply to the MUA request, the CPB reiterated its previous stand.

The university affairs minister, Anuwat Wattanapongsiri, then talked to the manager of the RSC and received verbal agreement to allow the MUA to use the land.

In November 1990, the RSC asked the MUA to set up a team to negotiate the matter in detail with the RSC.

In the meantime, the Rapi committee received cabinet approval on July 24, 1990, to set-up a foundation called the "October 14 Foundation" (to be in put in charge of the memorial construction) and to transfer the confiscated money to the foundation.

The foundation was subsequently set up on October 8, 1990 - the only tangible progress in the whole process.

Before any serious negotiation with the RSC could start, there was a coup d'etat.

**Round Seven - April 1991:** Mr Anand Panyarachun became prime minister. On April 16, 1991 his cabinet reappointed the committee.

On July 25 and on August 14, 1991, the MUA requested the office of the CPB as a coordinator and urged the RSC to enter negotiation.

The CPB reacted to the MUA request by sending a copy of the MUA letter to the RSC.

Nothing happened until the end of the Anand government.

**Round Eight - August 1992:** During the height of the mass protest against the Suchinda government in May 1992, the Public Relations Department (PRD) building went up in flames.

Mr Anand was reappointed prime minister after the resignation of Gen Suchinda.

On June 29, 1992, the Anand Cabinet resolved that a public park be built on the PRD area. The Supreme Patriarch graciously gave the name of Santiporn Park. The name means the blessing of peace and suggests a reconciliation.

A new committee was appointed by the Anand government

on August 25, 1992, and its scope was extended to build a memorial for both the events of October 14, 1973 and May 1992.

This time, the Minister of University Affairs replaced Prof Rapi as its chairman.

Nothing more happened until the end of Mr Anand's term.

**Round nine - December 1992:** Mr Chuan Leekpai succeeded Mr Anand after the general election in September 1992.

On December 8, 1992 his cabinet reconfirmed the appointment of the new committee.

The committee resolved in its first meeting on December 18, 1992 to negotiate again with the RSC. This time the RSC gave no response to the MUA request.

The committee decided to move the memorial location to an area next to Santiporn Park.

On May 11, 1993, the Cabinet agreed that a memorial should be built on a one-rai plot of land close to Santiporn Park.

The MUA on June 2, 1993, requested the Ministry of Finance - which is in charge of Santiporn Project - to allocate the land.

The Rattanakosin Committee, which supervises all construction inside the inner city, objected to the idea of constructing a memorial next to Santiporn Park. It favoured the Kawkwua location and offered to contact the CPB on this matter.

It did so and sent a letter dated October 21, 1993 to the committee saying the CPB is willing to consider the MUA's rental request.

The demolition of the fire-gutted building and the design of Santiporn Park took quite a long time.

Finally on June 14, 1995, the Ministry of Finance told the committee a plot of about half a rai in the shape of an elongated triangle next to the National Lottery Office was earmarked for the memorial's construction, but details depended on the completion of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's road design.

Nothing more happened until the end of the Chuan government.

**Round Ten - July 1995:** A general election on July 2, 1995 installed the government led by Mr Banharn Silpa-archa.

The committee in charge of Santiporn Park project met on September 11 and resolved that, although the park construction contract had been signed, priority should be given to solving the traffic problem.

Nothing more happened until the end of the Barnharn government.

**Round Eleven - Today:** With the public outcry against Col Narong's pension, the memorial project is again revived. It's now up to Prime Minister Chavalit to make good his promise.

✿ *Editor's Note: This report is based on an article by Dr Gotham Arya of the PollWatch Committee as well as through a compilation of newspaper clippings.*

**Front**

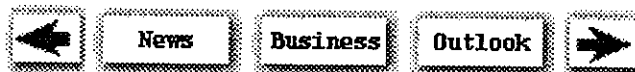
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Last Modified: Mon, Apr 7, 1997



OCTOBER 14 UPRISING

# Hope rises for pushers of memorial

*After years of facing hurdles at every turn*

**Suphawadee Susanpoolthong**

The attempt to build a memorial to the October 14, 1973, popular uprising began one year after that momentous event. However, for 24 years, it had been thwarted and frustrated at every turn.

But the people at the forefront of the effort refused to give up their aspiration. Each year they renewed their vow to see the memorial built. In the auspicious 25th anniversary of that historic event, their wish is about to be realised.

It has raised the hope that the event, which has been hailed for bringing freedom and democracy to Thais by one group of people but blamed for dividing the nation by another, will finally take its rightful place in history.

"A mature society should allow history to proceed on its natural course," said Thirayuth Boonmi, one of the foremost student leaders of the uprising.

"The October 14 event has made it possible for democracy to put down its firm root, leading to a political reform and eventually the latest constitution. We should therefore build the memorial to commemorate the event as well as to demonstrate the maturity of Thai society."

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Mr Thirayuth, who presides over the organisation of the 25th anniversary activities, said the memorial is meant to pay homage to the spirit of sacrifice shown by those killed in the uprising and people nationwide "who have fought to realise the aspiration for rights, liberty and democracy".

It was during the government of Prof Sanya Thammasak, who became prime minister after the uprising, that a cabinet resolution was passed to initiate a plan for the memorial construction at Kok Wua intersection, the scene of many major political gatherings in the past.

But the right-wing backlash which resulted in the October 6, 1976, massacre of pro-democracy students effectively squashed the plan. Opposition by the military also ensured that the plan never saw the light of day. The military denounced the planned memorial as a "symbol of divisiveness" in the nation and that it represented condemnation of the military as the force of dictatorship.

A dim light appeared in 1989 during the government of Gen Chatichai Choonhavan. A committee was set up to consider the memorial plan. But that ray of hope, too, was extinguished when the military, led by Gen Suchinda Kraprayoon, staged a mid-air coup d'etat that toppled Gen Chatichai.

Another serious push to raise the spirit of the memorial took shape during the government of Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudhk who was asked to chair the long-dormant committee. Little was achieved, however.

"There were many meetings but each time we got the same answer that it couldn't be done because of military opposition," said a committee source.

He said the opposition was not explicit but was relayed to some committee members. At other times, the opposition was expressed explicitly by right-wing groups such as the Apirak Chakri which warned of a major demonstration if the plan went ahead.

In the meantime, democracy groups including the October 14 Foundation tried to work quietly to get concerned parties to agree to the memorial plan. But the efforts ran into much difficulty.

According to another source, the Crown Property Bureau which was represented on the committee refused to discuss the request to use the Kok Wua intersection area for the construction.

Instead, the bureau referred the groups to the Ratchadamnoen Boxing Stadium, which it said held a lease contract over the land



occupied by lottery-vending stalls. But the stadium authority refused to discuss the handover of the land, telling the groups to negotiate directly with the lottery stallholders. The stallholders refused to vacate the land.

A breakthrough came only recently after the committee chairmanship was passed on to Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai. But, according to the source, it was former prime minister Anand Panyarachun who worked actively behind the scene to obtain a kind of consensus from all concerned parties to let the long-hoped-for memorial take a concrete shape.

Prasarn Marukkhaphitak, a former student activist who works under the foundation for the memorial project, said the foundation had recently reached a "gentlemen's agreement" with the Crown Property Bureau.

The foundation has also reached a tentative agreement with the lottery stallholders, with the help of the Treasury Department and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, to move out by the end of the year.

The memorial design, selected in a contest since 1975, has a half-circle building consisting of a conference room and a museum, among other things, a 14-metre-high cone-shaped sculpture was recently added.

But the democracy campaigners were not entirely out of the woods. The design needs the approval of the Rattanakosin Island Committee, which monitors all development projects within the old city limits.

The committee was not entirely happy with the design, something the campaigners fear would represent another obstacle. Senior committee member Adul Vichiencharoen criticised the sculpture, saying it had an "inappropriate political overtone" because the cone shape depicted divisiveness within the society. It should have been a sphere instead, he said, because it would depict unity.

The conference room which was included in the original design would also draw undesirable traffic to the old city, Mr Adul said.

However, he said the criticism represented only the committee's opinion, not its objection to the construction of the memorial as a whole. The opinion was meant for the campaigners to incorporate into design adjustments.

The memorial campaigners "need not return the adjusted design to us for consideration. If the BMA approves the design, they can go ahead with the construction ... We only gave our opinion but we

agree with the plan in principle," Mr Adul said.

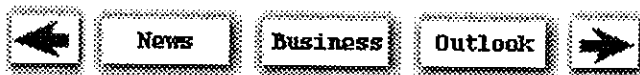
Democracy advocate Pibhop Dhongchai said the memorial committee was prepared to make some adjustments to the memorial hall, such as changing the conference room into an exhibition hall.

But he defended the sculpture design, saying it was an art work the meaning of which was in the eye of the beholder. "The major content of the work is to demonstrate the people's responsibility to fight for democracy, the beauty of people's rights and freedom and justice in society."

He applauded the decision by all concerned government agencies as showing "an open mind by allowing the people's memorial to be built".

Dr Sem Pringpuangkaew, chairman of the memorial committee, believes the memorial would represent a sign of the "good health" of Thai society. It was undeniable that the October 14 event had been beneficial to Thai society and should be commemorated for its role in the development of Thai politics, he said.

"Twenty five years is long enough for all wounds to heal and for the memorial to come into being. We wish for peace and happiness in society, not to hurt any feeling. We also want to show our appreciation to the people who have sacrificed their lives for democracy," said Dr Sem.



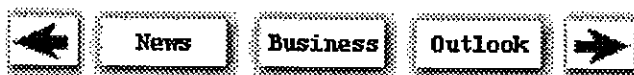
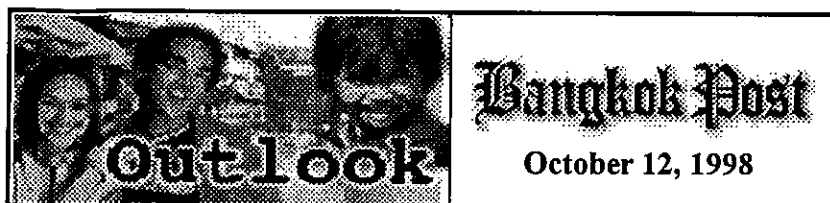
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Last Modified: Tue, Oct 13, 1998

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# Setting the past in stone

*OCTOBER 14 UPRISING: On the 25th anniversary of the bloody 1973 uprising, Outlook heard 11 views on why it is so important to ensure a monument is built to commemorate the event, remember the freedoms it won and pay tribute to the sacrifices made to win them*

Twenty five years ago, several hundred thousand demonstrators marched along Ratchadamnoen Avenue to free the country from dictatorship. Students, young people and many other members of the general public raised their bare arms against batons and bullets and many lost their lives.

In the national memory the grandeur of the popular uprising on October 14, 1973, remains vivid. Despite this, there has been no permanent structure to commemorate the event - to mark the joy of the freedoms won, grief for the lives lost and the political development the event brought to people in the Kingdom.

On this year's 25th anniversary it is hoped work on the October 14 monument - the country's long overdue tribute to those who made tremendous sacrifices for democracy - will get off ground. Today, *Outlook* reveals what people have to say about the October 14 monument.

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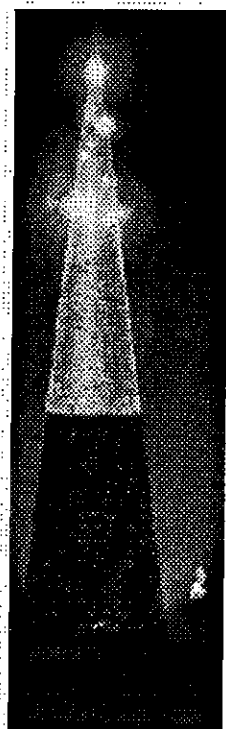
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**F**orty empty years - a nation  
 silent;  
 Forty million people dared not move an  
 inch;  
 Earth to sand and wood to stone all  
 broken,  
 All asleep, all paralysed in heart and eye.

.....  
 So the rot set in  
 As it must in what is still,  
 Until, amid the murk  
 A lotus bloomed.

And then a little movement,  
 Fair and free of filth  
 Unclear, still dulled  
 And yet a sign of life.

Then the drum sounded  
 And the great day came.  
 The guns resounded  
 And the people fought to win.



## Annual Report

**Naowarat Pongpaiboon**, *Mere Movement*. Written a year after the October 14 uprising. Translated by Michael Wright

### **Ekavit Na Thalang**, educator

The popular uprising on October 14, 1973, was an attempt by students and people to push the yoke of dictatorship off their backs. It was another step towards democracy next to the 1932 revolution which turned the country from an absolute monarchy to a democracy.

The event brought about bruises and pain. It was the price for freedom and liberty.

We have had democracy, though somewhat half-hearted, since. We already have the new constitution, which promotes decentralisation. Development was not possible without the uprising.

The October 14 event, therefore, was an important step in the development of Thai democracy. What happened then has had a great influence on how we think subsequently. That is why I think we should build a monument so future generations will have something concrete with which to commemorate the event - a reminder of one victory.

Perception and concreteness have an incredible effect on people's psychology. Recording the event in history books is not enough because we Thais are forgetful. A monument will stand as a profound symbol that will create an appreciation of democracy in Thai society.

### **Nithi Eawsiwong, historian**

Why is the October 14 monument necessary? Because the October 14 uprising is important.

First, the event ushered in a new era in Thai politics and the monument will remind people of this transition.

More importantly, the new era embraces such values as the protection of human rights and democracy, and a monument would bring these values home to people.

Second, the uprising showed there were people - some are dead and some still alive - who believed individuals have a duty to protect the interests of society.

In my view, this concept of people dedicating themselves to a common cause was a new dimension, very much limited in the past.

In this light, no social sacrifices are more evident than during the October 14 protest. The importance of the uprising in both aspects exists, with or without the monument. The question is, do we believe these two aspects are worth being preserved and disseminated throughout out society? If we do, then we should do anything in our capacity to instill the values powerfully, effectively and rapidly.

I believe the monument is one way to keep the importance of the October 14 event in people's hearts. And I think we should build it.

### **Chiranan Pitpreecha: October 14 student activist**



Painter Pratueng  
Emjareon at work.

Historically, the October 14 uprising had a profound impact on the Thai political and social structure. It is part of the country's common memory, which should be recorded in different ways and formats so it will not disappear with a generation of people.

It can be a monument, text book, video or CD Rom. There is no problem as long as the truth is rightfully interpreted and conveyed. A monument, however, is different from other means of commemoration because it is also a symbol of glory.

In this sense, it will glorify the pure spirit of the students and people in fighting against military dictatorship.

Even more, a monument will pass on the spirit of democracy to future generations. Honesty and sincerity are crucial in the process of creation. But the monument will only be sacred if it can restore the October 14 spirit thoroughly without being anyone's political tool.

### **Charnvit Kasetsiri, historian**

In ancient times, Asians built monuments or memorials for religious beliefs, pagodas or stupas, for example. Secular monuments emerged about 100 years ago - King Rama V's equestrian statue, Bangrajan villagers' statue and the Democracy Monument, to name a few.

Secular monuments are immensely relevant to politics. Statues of past rulers, for example, are mostly commissioned by governors or the power-that-be.

The October 14 monument is different.

Unlike the first generation of statues that are mostly made by state leaders (except King Taksin's statue which was initiated by politicians, members of the parliament, academics and writers), the October 14 monument is an initiative from the bottom up.

The idea for it was pushed forward by people involved in the event, students and ordinary citizens, most of them members of the middle class.

The whole business of monument building eventually boils down to the politics of memory. What people will memorise or not is politics in itself. Which monument the state or society "chooses" to build is also a political matter. Choosing not to build one,

means choosing not to remember it.

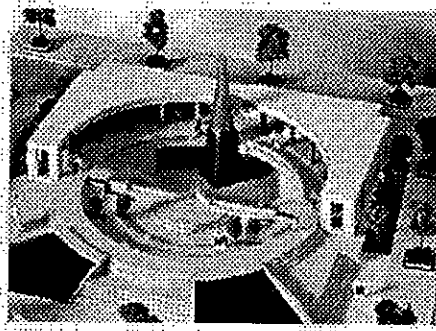
The October 14 monument has been delayed by the politics of memory for 25 years. I still doubt if the construction will ever be completed.

If it is, then it will serve as a social reminder. How the monument will help people memorise anything other than the date depends on how it is designed and presented.

### **Chalardchai Ramitanon, anthropologist**

Should Thai people commemorate what happened during October 14, 1973?

The answers vary, depending on who the people are and where they stand in society's power structure.



To me, the October 14 is significant in terms of social history. To appreciate it, we have to look at this event as a continuous process of changes, which like it or not, are irresistible.

The revolution in 1932, which replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy, promised Thai society that from then on their rights, freedoms and equality were guaranteed.

History, however, told us that in reality this was not the case. But the revolution did succeed in unlocking the door to liberty.

Since 1960s, rapid Westernisation has rapidly changed the country. We finally realised development was unequal. But who can ask or push for a fairer development when the door to rights and freedom is still blocked?

The October 14 uprising was not only a heroic fight of students and intellectuals. It was an attempt to open the door to freedom. What should be remembered is, that it was opened by the people, who as theory goes, are the real owners of democratic power.

All that said, it is hard to argue against a monument for an uprising which, as an ideological force, brought about freedom and equality at the cost of many lives and much suffering.

### **Chatchai Puypia, artist**

"I helped shape the idea of walling the base of the monument with small terra cotta panels each bearing the heroes' names, and with other impressions of the event by artists and ordinary people.

The original design gave a sense of stillness, confounded by the use of a simple form, rock, metal and clear glass.

I don't think a monument for such a dynamic event should be an architecture that is complete in itself. I would like to involve people, to encourage participation. The terra cotta tiles, therefore, came into the picture.

Terra cotta has the right feeling. We can write names, make traces or record anything on it. The panels will incorporate elements from a wide base of people. It will become a live sculpture, something like conceptual art. We won't be able to predict what the outcome will be.

I do believe the beauty of the monument lies not on its form or fixed design, but in the participation and cooperation that goes on behind its construction.

I think we should expand the participation through the terra cotta panels in the future. If more people want to express their ideas, we can use them to decorate the walls, the amphitheatre or the building itself.

It is the truth and feelings expressed by real people that matter, not any theory about art and aesthetics.

### **Kanya Chareonsuphakul, artist**

The monument as a whole represents ideas about the quest for freedom and right things. It is like a page in the history of the Thai people.

As an art form, the monument should effectively convey the historical importance of the event. It must be simple and easy to understand because it is supposed to grasp the attention of every Thai.

It is also a reminder for the powers-that-be, the rulers and the public.

It should remind them, not that we have already attained the perfection, but that we should continue to walk forward with care. There shouldn't be any more losses.

### **Preecha Thaothong, artist**



What is distinctive about the monument is the fact the organising committee invites local artists to incorporate their ideas about the event into the monument.

The cooperation reflects the essence of democracy. Each terra cotta panel is one vote cast. It is not the way monuments were built in Thailand.

The names of people who died during the event will also be written on the terra cotta panels. Poems and writings about the uprising will also be recorded, merging visual art with literature. The terra cotta walls will be like a flow, fusing different elements in life. The dead heroes will become a part of the flow, too.

### **Somchai Hattakitkosol, artist**

The monument gives a sense of power and sharpness. It is stunning enough to turn heads.

I feel that it has the form of traditional Thai pagodas, which are recognisable wherever they stand. It looks strong and stable, at the same time embracing a sense of grace and delicateness.

The top part of the monument resembles the tops of waves, telling the people of how far they have come and the long road ahead.

From another angle, the wave-like feature may serve to dispel any remaining resentment or bitterness, just like waves that sweep the shore clean.

### **Wasant Sithiket, artist**

The core of the monument is the people's fight for freedom and democracy. Many died for these values. The monument exists to announce that the fight has not ended. It is not a place to light candles or incense sticks and pray. It is a symbol of life, ideology and responsibility for social change.

### **Prapat Panyachatrak, wounded during the uprising**

The monument is extremely important because it will be a proof of the virtue and bravery of the people who fought for democracy. It will also remind the society not to resort to violence to suppress the people again.

Above all, it will be a concrete example for youth to learn about social dedication.

There were times in the past when I felt resentful that there was no progress on the monument. It is a bit late to build it now. But I am glad I have a chance to see it before I die.

I would love Thai people to realise the importance of the October 14 uprising. Don't forget things easily. Especially people who suffered from the event and their relatives. These people need and deserve attention and care from us.

They made a tremendous contribution to society, but have received little or nothing in return. We have left these wounded souls to struggle in solitude for so long. It is time to pay them back.



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