

GALA DINNER LAUNCHES FUND RAISING DRIVE

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MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL
THE SIAM SOCIETY

Long planned, The Siam Society's gala dinner to launch its fund raising campaign must, surely, be considered a re-sounding success. In the gracious presence of our Honorary President, Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana, more than 400 members and friends gathered at the Bangkok Hilton International Hotel on 14 August 1991 for an evening combining pleasure with philanthropy. The presence of the Prime Minister of Thailand as guest speaker was unprecedented in the 87-year history of the Society.

For such an august occasion it may seem to verge on the indecent to mention prosaic matters such as the notorious Bangkok traffic jams. However, it was the Prime Minister himself, His Excellency Mr. Anand Panyarachun, who revealed that even he was not spared the daily torture to which residents of the City of Angels are forced to submit themselves. On that very evening, the present writer was privileged to discover, to his chagrin, that three hours does not always suffice to cover five kilometres in Bangkok. If that journey does not quite qualify for inclusion in the Guinness Book of Records, the day when one will is now fast approaching.

Addressing the assembled guests, H.R.H. Princess Galyani spoke of her sadness at the environmental degradation she saw in travelling around the country. At the same time, many of the social and cultural values and traditions of Thailand were being discarded and forgotten. But it was not necessary to lose this precious heritage if everyone was aware of the problem, the issues involved and of what could be done.

The government alone could not solve all the problems and the initiative must be seized by conscientious citizens and active non-governmental organizations. The Siam Society, with its proud history of service and the talents of its members, was uniquely placed to raise public consciousness and to stimulate thinking and research on cultural and environmental issues.

To make this contribution two things were needed. Firstly, the Society must have the enthusiastic support and active involvement of its members and, secondly, the Society must be financially strong if it was to carry out effectively its



Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana is escorted to the Siam Society dinner by Dr. Piriya Krairiksh and Mr. Dacre F.A. Raikes, O.B.E.

mission of cultural and environmental preservation. Her Royal Highness hoped that all would join her to make the fund raising drive a success. Whether contributions were financial or in the form of time, effort and knowledge, all would have the satisfaction of helping a venerable Thai institution to continue its good work and in playing a part in preserving Thailand's heritage and natural environment.

The Prime Minister prefaced his prepared speech on "The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Thailand" with some scintillating off-the-cuff remarks that soon had his audience rocking with appreciative laughter.

"I'm going to tell you a few secrets tonight," he began. He said he was often asked whether he was a puppet of the military, to which his response was a categorical "No, I am not a puppet of the military." Later, though, he confessed that he is a puppet of Khun Mechai Viravaidya, the well-known Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, and that was why he was present. In a further revelation Mr. Anand said that though the Thai government is not a non-governmental

Siam Society at the Annual General Meeting in 1944. It was he who led Council members to lay a wreath at the urn of King Ananda Mahidol in June 1946.

H.R.H. Prince Wan Waithayakorn was appointed as the chief delegate of Thailand at the United Nations Conference in New York, and was successful in gaining membership for the Kingdom. Although he was out of the country between August 1946 and January 1947 he was able to preside over the A.G.M. in February 1947. He withdrew as a candidate for President because he had been appointed to become the new Thai Ambassador to the United States. During this time he served also as Thailand's representative to the United Nations. He continued as the country's representative to the U.N. after his term as ambassador to the United States was completed and was unanimously elected President of the General Assembly for 1956-1957. Because of his calm attitude (far different from that of some delegates) and prudence, he was called the "unperturbable Buddhist" by the New York Times newspaper.

Prince Wan also served a period of time as Foreign Minister, and in 1959 was appointed a Deputy Prime Minister — an office he held for many years and under more than one Prime Minister. He was an active Rector of Thammasat University for many years and was widely respected by the students for his work in upgrading the status of the university, and not being content with serving merely as a figure-head.

In 1969 Prince Wan again became President of The Siam Society. One of Prince Wan's favorite occupations was "The Coining of Siamese Words," the topic of his talk presented at the A.G.M. on March 26, 1970. One of his better known "new" words was *ratthathammanūn*, meaning constitution.

During the 1930s Prince Wan founded a newspaper—*Prachachat*. The English translation which appeared under the masthead was "Nation." (The paper ceased publication during World War II when the press was commandeered by the Government.) In one of his columns Prince Wan wrote about coining words and their connection with the change in government. He explained: "...I saw that what was happening was not just a change of government but a fundamental change in the way of life of the Thai people...and I wanted to explain all that to the Thai people. So I started a newspaper...I was at once confronted with the necessity of coining new words, because in order to get to the people and to get at the people, we cannot use English words which have not penetrated into our system of thought. If we can get hold of a Thai word, all the better, but if we can't we have recourse to Pali and Sanskrit words which have come into our language.

Maybe only the monks will understand at first but the reading public will soon understand from the context in which the new coinages are used."

The Journal of The Siam Society, Volume 59 part 2, was dedicated to H.R.H. Prince Wan Waithayakorn to commemorate his 80th birthday on August 25, 1971. On February 26, 1974 His Royal Highness formally opened "The Prince Wan Room" as a part of the 70th anniversary of the founding of The Siam Society. He was then presented with a Thai-style folding book signed by members of the Council and the Society who were present for the occasion. The room was used for many years to house the rarest of the rare book collection of The Siam Society Library. The JSS Volume 63 part 2, July, 1975 was dedicated to the President, H.R.H. Prince Wan Waithayakorn, Kromamun Naradhip Bongsprabandh, in honor of his 7th cycle (84 years) birthday celebration on August 25th.

Prince Wan was President of the Royal Academy from 1934 - 1947 and again from 1973 to 1975. He was recalled from government retirement by His Majesty the King who appointed him President of the National Assembly, and was an active participant in the drafting of the 1974 Constitution.

The Presidency of The Siam Society was the last regular activity in which His Royal Highness was engaged. He chaired the Council meeting on August 3, 1976. Prince Wan underwent surgery on August 27 at Chulalongkorn Hospital and died on the afternoon of September 5, 1976.

At the Council meeting of September 7 the Senior Vice-President called the meeting to order and Council stood in silent respect for their late President.

H.R.H. Prince Wan once advised journalists to follow this rule: "Observe your obligations to develop goodwill, study for knowledge, and work for peace."

In 1989 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in its calendar of Anniversaries of Great Personalities and Historic Events for 1990-1991, declared His Royal Highness Prince Wan Waithayakorn Kromamun Naradhip Bongsprabandh as *Great Scholar and Diplomat*. Centennial celebrations of his birth are being organized from August 1991 till August 1992 in Bangkok, Paris, Geneva and New York. A seminar was held at the Naradhip Research Centre which was founded by Prince Wan. The Philatelic Division of the Communications Authority of Thailand (CAT) issued a commemorative postage stamp to honor the learned and well-respected Prince. Prince Wan brought honor to his country and gave diplomacy a new role model — and he is remembered.



His Excellency Mr. Anand Panyarachun, Prime Minister of Thailand, addresses the Siam Society.

organization, he was able to say that it was a non-profit organization!

After beguiling his audience with other examples of his wit he turned to the more serious subject of the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Thailand, unveiling the plans he had to upgrade them.

He first pointed out that in reality no Thai government has, nor will be able to fulfil the naive expectation that it must and can provide for all the basic needs of the entire under-privileged population. Now, more than ever, Thailand needed the assistance and co-operation of this important group, generally known for what it is not, rather than for what it is, to share this burden. The group now preferred to call itself Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), a term more accurately describing its nature and role. At present Thai PVOs were seriously handicapped in a number of ways. The economic boom had brought great benefits to the business community but had resulted in cutbacks in funding for PVOs, especially in grants and assistance from abroad which made up 80% of their resources. These cuts were accompanied by skyrocketing office rental and staff costs.

Mr. Anand then described the Thai bureaucratic impediments to the establishment or registration of new PVOs, such that it was difficult to complete the formalities in less than two years. The Natural Cultural Commission, the Police Department's Criminal Investigation Bureau and the Labour Department were all implicated in this process. The Prime Minister suggested that if his appointment had to secure similar approval he might not have passed the test.

This situation was paradoxical in departing from Thailand's long cultural heritage which had always promoted philanthropy and voluntarism. Today, while there were almost 10,000 registered PVOs in Thailand, only about 200 had tax-exempt status as direct public benefit service providers. It was, in his view, essential to accept PVOs as a genuine alternative to governmental support and therefore to promote

and expand the role they could play. Mr. Anand said that he planned to introduce steps to change the rules and regulations from control- and hindrance-oriented to a set more conducive of support and co-operation. His proposals would :

- make registration and establishment procedures easy and fast to reflect the priority role of PVOs.

- promote and encourage philanthropy by raising the current limits of tax deductability above one percent of net profit for corporate contributions, and above ten percent of net income for individuals.

- provide some government funding as general support for PVOs, although they should rely upon society in general for money, materials and skills.

- require all government ministries and departments to cultivate, encourage and foster PVOs as a partner in the social and economic development of Thailand.

- foster the spirit of philanthropy and volunteerism amongst the adult population.

The Prime Minister continued that companies could provide much more than financial contributions alone. They could adopt schools, students, or even entire villages or PVOs themselves. Staff skills and materials would make valuable contributions and companies could reward staff for community volunteer service. They could match financial pledges made by their staff. He also wished to encourage more people to become volunteers for a year or two in rural Thailand or underprivileged urban areas. Compulsory military service could sometimes be substituted by a similar term of community service. If a special educational loan fund was established for needy students, they could be required to work with PVOs during holidays and after graduation to repay the loan as semi-volunteers in specific fields and locations.

Mr. Anand concluded his speech by saying that he hoped his views and aspirations might mark the beginning of a new era of responsible citizenship in Thailand.

He was warmly applauded by all present.

The evening closed on an encouraging note with a very amusing display of his consummate wizardry by Khun Mechai in auctioning off two books written and autographed by H.R.H. Princess Galyani. Opening the bidding for the first book, เวลาเป็นของมีค่า (Busy Fingers), at B 50,000, Khun Mechai said that no-one should be afraid to make the first bid because it was never successful. By diligent misinterpretation of signals from bidders he raised the price to a final figure of 160,000, at which sum the volume was acquired by Mr. Jacques Mayer of Geneva, Switzerland. For the second book, เจ้าชายเล็ก ๆ - ยุวกษัตริย์, of which only 30 copies exist (Only 29 apart from this one in the whole world"), bidding began at 100,000, rising in leaps and bounds at Khun Mechai's instigation to 270,000 before being knocked down to Mr. Plengsakdi Prakasert. This was fund raising with a vengeance and brought a highly successful evening to a most satisfying conclusion.

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**List of Donations
as of 20 October 1991**

	Baht
H.R.H. Princess Galyani Vadhana	500,000.-
Mr. Chow Chowkwanyun (The Education & Public Welfare Foundation)	1,000,000.- ¹
Jim Thompson Foundation	500,000.-
Bangkok Steel Industry Co., Ltd.	320,000.-
Mr. Jacques Mayer	160,000.-
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The Siam Cement Co., Ltd.	100,000.-
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Miss Bancha Chittibhol	500.-
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Anonymous	480.-
Total	3,828,980.-

¹ For Thai-language journal.

² For the JSS.