

Record of Mr. Anand Panyarachun's Address
at the Foreign Correspondents' Club (FCCT)
on Wednesday, May 18, 2005

Introductory Speech by the President of the FCCT :

It is a great pleasure to welcome back to the Club, not only one of Thailand's most respected senior statesmen, but also a good friend of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand. Most of you are familiar with Khun Anand and the contribution he has made not only in Thailand but internationally over the years. Of course, the reason he is here to speak to us tonight is in his capacity as the Chairman of the National Reconciliation Commission. As you know, this was the Commission set up by the Prime Minister and charged with examining the problems in Southern Thailand and seeking to come up with suggestions for peaceful solutions. Many analysts characterize it as the last opportunity for that kind of solution. The timing, of course, is particularly interesting. The Prime Minister has been accused of taking a very militaristic line. Indeed, the reports that come out today from the international crisis group again charge the Thaksin Government for exacerbating the situation in the South. We have already seen a growth in the number and the sophistication of attacks in the South. Of course, last month there were bombings in Hat Yai. It was the first time we witnessed explosions of that type out in the deep South, coordinated and apparently targeted at international targets : the airport, a supermarket and a hotel.

Now, the Commission has 49 members drawn from many different walks of political, cultural and social life, and has been promised a large degree of independence in its deliberations. Indeed, Khun Anand has been to the South and has begun meeting and talking to people, community leaders down there. I will just add that, as well, of course, in his long career in politics and diplomacy, he was twice Prime Minister of Thailand, during which he tackled many difficult and challenging tasks. Being, I believe, the first leader in Asia to really recognize the problems of HIV/Aids and construct a programme to deal with it. More recently, he was intimately involved in drawing up a new Thai constitution in 1997, and also chaired the top UN Panel looking at the UN's collective response to security threats.

Now, the Commission, which he now heads, was described by the Thai Rath newspaper as probably the best independent Commission we have ever had. But, I also suspect that of all the challenges that Khun Anand has faced over his illustrious career in politics and diplomacy, few can be or cannot be a

challenging as this. I think it would probably not be an exaggeration to say that this is one of the most important nights that we have at the Club.

It really is a critical time in the South, and the role of the Commission in examining the problems and coming up with solutions cannot really be underestimated. So, I would ask you to give a warm welcome to Khun Anand.

Khun Anand :

Thank you very much, Mr. Williams, President of FCCT, and distinguished members and guests. I am not sure what the format is going to be, but I understand that you would permit me to speak about fifteen minutes, and then I will be subjected to your questions. I hope you will be kind to me.

First of all, it is a great pleasure to be invited back here. I recall that when I was Prime Minister, I did seize the opportunities of communicating with the members of the foreign press on what our Government had been trying to do and what our agenda would be. Thirteen years have gone by and much water has flowed under the bridge. I have assumed different incarnations : as Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee and as Chairman of the National Economic and Social Advisory Council. Last year was one of the busiest years I have ever had in my life. I had to chair a UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change. I am sure that not too many people understand even now what it is all about. The whole idea was to try to energize the United Nations system, particularly the Security Council, to engage in productive debates leading to collective responses and collective actions against threats to world peace and security. Now that job was completed, and I passed the buck back to Kofi Annan, and I think he is having a more difficult time than I had with my fifteen other members of the Panel.

Be that as it may, I thought this year is going to be a very easy year for me. I had long planned to retire. I promised my wife many years ago that I would retire at the age of fifty-six and I am getting on to seventy-three. Luckily she has not divorced me yet. Next year I promised myself that I would not accept any other call. But I make that pledge every year. So, you had better wish me luck.

Now, this National Reconciliation Commission is nothing new to you. Those of you who are based here and have been following the events in the South and how the Government, initially, with the emphasis on the word initially, tackled the problem. Mr. Williams did say that it is a Commission of forty-nine people and I disagree with one of your remarks. You said that I was promised a large degree of freedom. No, I was given total freedom and that was

the condition I insisted on the Prime Minister and, so far, I think he has kept his word, and I give him credit for that.

We have a Commission of forty-nine people. I know about half of them personally, but the other half of the members were nominated to me, whispered into my ears or conveyed to me, and I studied their CVs. I asked a number of people on the credentials of these nominees. The qualification for being a member of my Commission is that he or she must have an independent mind, and that he or she must be committed to peaceful solutions of the problem in the South. I am not trying to have a Commission of those who speak the same language. I think it is important that I include a variety of opinions and judgments. But so long as they are committed to peace and peaceful solutions, that is good enough for me. I often said jokingly that my task of reconciliation started even before the Commission was set up because, initially, I have to have reconciliation with the Prime Minister, because he knows that on this particular issue and on some other political issues, I stand rightly opposite to his viewpoint. But I have always been honest with him, and I think he respects my independence and my freedom of action.

It took me two meetings to explain the facts of life to him and also to reason with him on the unproductive outcome of his past policies and also on the inefficiency of the management of the past policies. But, particularly on the mindset of a number of government leaders and public opinion moulders. I think he was kind enough to listen to me attentively and, at least, to agree to disagree with me on certain points. But, eventually, I think he was brought around to the positions that I thought I could accept. They were not identical positions but, at least, they would not be contradictory to what I have long planned to do. He was good enough to give me a free hand. I said that even though that Commission was appointed by the Prime Minister, I would not be engaged in this task unless I had a free hand.

I explained to him the structure of the Commission I was planning, and the division of labour. My viewpoints were that it needed to be led by the civil sector, the people, and that the Government and the politicians would take, I wouldn't say secondary, but not a primary role, and that I would have full freedom to select whoever I thought fit. As for the structure, I would have eighteen or nineteen people from the area, and about six politicians, about ten or eleven civil servants and also a number of civil sector people outside the area. I included two Buddhist monks. I included a number of Islamic clerics. And even in the civil sector allocation, I even included a former commander of the forces in the South, a retired General who is a Muslim and who is well-respected in the area. And I included a number of politicians at my own choice, who would be sitting in my Commission as independent members, so they wear two

hats. When they work for me in the Commission, they have to express their independent views. And the same would be for ten or eleven civil servants that I included. I even included a General who is the head of the..., I don't know what the English term is but in Thai it is "คณะกรรมการฝ่ายสันติภาพ" something like a peace-building commission, or whatever. There were about eight ladies on our Commission, and I have people who are familiar with the culture, with the history, with the religion, both Buddhism and Islam, political scientists, NGO people and individuals who have long been involved in the conflict resolution exercise and people who know the area, know the people and can empathize with the people in general.

We have had three formal meetings, twice in Bangkok and once in Pattani. And only two weeks ago, I was down there with some fifteen members of my Commission, together with the people on the ground. We visited Narathiwat and Yala. We held public hearings. We held one-on-one conversations with the aggrieved, with the injured and with the relatives of the dead. But I think it is important at this juncture to tell you what we are and what we are not, because otherwise I am bound to get questions that I prefer not to answer.

First of all, the independent Commission is appointed by the Government, by the Prime Minister, and we have been given free hands. We have been given all the facilities; we will be given an adequate budgetary allocation. I do not report to the Prime Minister. I made it a point that it is an independent Commission. When I submit our report to the Government, perhaps early next year, simultaneously, I would release the report to the public. So there will be no questions on whether the report is the Government property or the property of the Commission.

I intend to operate the Commission in the most transparent and accountable manner. But we are not an executive agency; we are not an executive arm of the Government; we are not a law-enforcement agency; but it does not mean that we shift our responsibility. Since we do not have a police force under our command, or a military force or an intelligence or a civil service, we cannot be expected to deal with day-to-day events which occur. If you are going to ask me: why was it that since the Commission was initiated, the unrest has not died down? That is not our responsibility. When it is a question of the day-to-day events and incidents which occur, I stressed to the Government that we need better intelligence and better law-enforcement measures. We need to stress the need for protection of human rights and promotion of freedom in that part of the country. With the day-to-day

incidents, I could talk to the Prime Minister or to some individuals who are in my Commission to convey messages – that is the most you can do.

Now, the second category of my mandate is that even though we are not responsible for the day-to-day events, past, present or future, we would do whatever we can to facilitate the co-operative atmosphere and co-operative relationship between the people and the Government authorities. We would allow ourselves to be a catalyst, a change agent. That is why we were not responsible for the setting up of the Commission or for their reports on Krue-Sae or Tak Bai. We did intervene and we did advise the Government that those reports should be released in full and the Government abided by our advice and passed on the authority to the Commission to consider whether the report or portions of the report could be released to the public. We did that about 3-4 weeks ago. We released the entire report with the deletion of names of certain individuals for the protection of their own identities, or in case it could impair or interfere with the course of justice that is being followed. But otherwise, the substance of the entire report was released, and we are urging the Government to withdraw the martial law. I am not going into details as to how I personally intervened in this matter and how I advised the Government.

Although these matters do not come, per se, within the scope of our responsibility, we thought that we could move them forward to create better atmosphere and better environment for the long-term reconciliation process. So, what is the long-term reconciliation process? Well, it is going to be long-term because, in my view, and I said it to the Prime Minister, the real issue is not separatism; the real issue is not terrorism. We recognize the seriousness of the separatist activities and also terrorist activities, but, to me and the members of Commission, those are not the front-line issues. They are, in my view, by-products of a much larger issue – and that larger issue, perhaps, involves the inability on both sides to understand each other. There have been incidents of injustices meted out by the Government authorities in the past, and also by the past policies, mistreatment of the people in the area, non-respect of the people of different cultures and religions, lack of awareness of the history of the area, and so forth; but the bottom line is that the people mistrust this Government, and there is no credibility. I mentioned this to the Prime Minister. Of course, he had the right to disagree with me. But I am sure that, at the back of his mind, he would have loved to say “yes” to me, that you were correct. I think it would be politically incorrect for him to make that pronouncement to me. I think the work of Commission could not be done successfully unless there is a clear understanding between me and the Prime Minister. I asked him to send a signal, a strong signal, to his people, firstly with members of his cabinet – which he duly did the next day after my second meeting with him. He even said at the cabinet meeting that he had a real conversation with me like a “farang to

farang”, to quote the term used in some Thai newspapers. What Khun Thaksin meant to say was that we had a really good, honest and candid conversation. That same week he even told his cabinet meeting that I admonished him for listening only to his cronies; that if you asked people around, be it the cabinet members or his political party members, he would have different stories as to how successful he was in the South. So he said to his cabinet members at the meeting that he would try to listen more to the people who disagree with him.

So I think I have done a lot for the reconciliation process between me and the Prime Minister, and we still have good working relations!

I was glad I was away from Thailand for about a week. I came back feeling very groggy yesterday, flying from North Carolina back to Bangkok with a six hour lay-over in London, and subjected to all those anti-terrorist measures at various airports. I was scared to listen to today’s news report that he said he had given instructions to his people in the south. Sometimes they did follow his instructions, but some times they didn’t. I supposed he’d like to say that there needs to be established in this country a civilian rule over the armed forces. Now, I will explain to you what we are, and what we are not; what we can do and what we are not in a position to do. It’s a daunting task. You cannot expect quick results. But we hope that at the end of the day we have established certain policies, certain measures and certain guidelines that would, in our view, collective view, lay a good foundation for making it more difficult and more unpalatable to ill-intentioned people to engage in any violent activities.

I mentioned my initial reconciliation with the Prime Minister, but I think that my present task is also try to reconcile the differences within our own Commission. I have about ten months more, and I am aiming to achieve a consensus report. When you have Government officials and politicians in my Commission, I hope that eventually we would be able to reach a consensus on the long-term policies and measures. But what is more important is that what we submit in terms of report or in terms of recommendations, those are just written paper. People ask whether the Government would follow the advice. I said how should I know. I don’t even know who is going to be in the Government next year.

Secondly, this is a question, an issue, that cannot be left to the Government exclusively to deal with the situation unless the majority of the Thai people, particularly those who live outside the three southernmost provinces, also change their mindset, unless they reduce their prejudices and pre-conceived ideas, we will not be able to achieve anything. But I am still hopeful. Your President rightly said that, of all the challenges that I have been asked to face, this would be the most difficult. People are still wondering why

on earth a man of my age who has stumbled through many hurdles in life, should decide to accept this responsibility. I recall that I gave an interview to the Bangkok Post three or four weeks ago, and the last question the gentleman asked me was : why did you accept it? So, I said to him “Oh, well, through my life, as if it were my fate, there is always a question not why, but why not?”

Thank you very much

Questions and Answers

Reception of the People in the South

I think that the setting up of the Commission and my past reputation, good or bad, have been well received and, of course, in my diplomatic, political and business career, I have made a few enemies in this country. So you still have some talk shows, some media people who would condemn me for whatever I do. This is a fact of life and it doesn't bother me. Obviously, I've gone through some of the worst periods in my life when I was a victim. I don't know whether many of you know that I was once accused of being a Communist when I was Permanent Secretary in the Foreign Service. And when it came to the October Event in 1976, I was suspended from duties. I was accused by the right-wingers, we had a mini McCarty period. I think Thailand is very much like an American society, very conservative and many times very parochial, and I suffered a lot, and my family too. I was accused by a certain group of military people and I was sort of vilified by a number of extreme right-wingers. Those people still exist in our society and you cannot get away from reality. This doesn't bother me, and that's that.

The report and the reception I received from the people in the area have been quite positive. I think you have to understand that the three southernmost provinces in Thailand constitute the upper part of the Malaysian Peninsula. Thanks to the UK colonial policy, Malaysia was divided up. The upper part of the Malaysian Peninsula were left under Thai control and the UK kept the rest. That was the result of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. And we all know something about the glorious days of the Pattani Kingdom that lasted over five to six centuries. Before that it was the Srivichai Empire.

So the difference between the people, the Muslim, the Thai Muslim in the South is that they are ethnic Malays. They are not like the Thai Muslims in Nong Jok or in two or three other areas in Bangkok or in Ayudhya, or in many other places in Thailand. We must recognize that fact and we must respect that

fact. Now the population of the whole area is nearly two million people, eighty-five per cent of whom are Muslims, Malay Muslims. But, they are Thais. On my father's side, I come from the Mon famil. My great grandfather, they came from Burma during King Rama IV and yet my grandfather rose to become Permanent Secretary of Defence. At that time, the Defense Ministry would have the administrative control of the South. On my mother's side, I am Chinese, I am fourth generation Chinese. You look around the room – who is a Thai? Or what is a Thai?

So, I think this is something that all we Thais have to stop and think as to who we are and what we are meant to be, and what we should be. Out of two million people, eighty-five per cent are Malay Muslims, but they are Thais. They were born in Thailand. They respect the Monarchy. Their Majesties King and Queen, the Crown Prince and Princesses have been there many times. Even at the height of the tension, Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn was there for four to five days. The Crown Prince spent a whole week visiting Muslim communities there. The Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims have been living in harmony for centuries. So, out of two million people, how many are actually involved in a core of separatism or the terrorist activities? The figure that was given to me was no more than fifteen thousand. But even out of these fifteen thousand, how many were really gunning on violence? Thanks to our media, both local and international, every incident in the South was reported to be the result of a terrorist activity or a separatist activity. So, I told the authorities there: you are not that efficient. First of all you cannot, you are not acting like a law-enforcing agency. You cannot take in suspects, you are not able to identify the suspects and bring them to the course of justice. My own personal estimate, after I talked to a number of people, is that no less than fifty per cent of about 1,600 incidents that occurred in the past year and five months, were criminal activities in connection with narcotics, smuggling, gambling and mismanagement of natural resources. So, I don't read newspapers. Every time you pick up a paper, every incident would be attributed to what we call "Jhon Pak Tai". (Southern rebels)

The implication was that they were all political activities. They were all rooted in separatism and terrorism. But that was not so. You talked and you all referred to the so-called co-ordinated attack at Hat Yai Airport and the Carrefour, or whatever Department Store. They were all isolated facts! Up to now, not a single organization has claimed that it is responsible for this or that attack. If you compare the situation in the South to that of Iraq, the gap is as wide as the Atlantic Ocean or the Pacific Ocean. All you have are separate incidents.. a man riding at the back of a motorcyclist either early in the morning or at night time in a remote place in a remote village and shooting to kill, mostly not successfully, but shooting to kill somebody sipping coffee at a roadside café.

All the arsons you heard. All right, there were some burnings of schools. But most of the burnings were public telephone booths and bus stops. So I think you have to have a more realistic and proportionate appreciation of the scale and dimension of the incidents that occurred.

Quite a number of people told me that there was a rise in the incidents. But if you observe the statistics, there are killing on a daily basis in every province. So, I think that the incident has been grossly exaggerated by the press, including the international press. When you talk about the terrorist issue in Thailand or in the South of Thailand, you must be aware that this a local issue and it can be managed by the locals and by local resources. The worst thing that can happen is that the whole thing becomes internationalized. You can forget or you can overlook now the failure of the past policies. But now it is starting a new chapter, so you must get to the basic fact. It is a difficult task. But not a difficult task in dealing with terrorism of separatism. I have lived in many countries. Wherever I went, whatever I read, there was a degree separatism in every country.

I still remember an incident many years ago, our former Prime Minister, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, who was educated in England. He was visiting England, and he had a meeting with the British Prime Minister, that was in the 70s. I forget the name of the British Prime Minister. Kukrit was asked: how is your insurgency in the North? And Kukrit, you know, is a good actor. He looked surprised as if it was something he heard for the first time, and his response was : how is your insurgency in Ireland? You go anywhere. You go to Spain, you have the Basques; you go to France, you have the Basques. You go to Russia, you have Chechenya, you go to China, you go to Germany, you go to America, you must go to Texas. You remember the Waco, Waco Incident? You go to Texas, there are still people who want to secede. So, I make the distinction. When you have a separatist issue, it is not a big deal. Try to treat it as a normal activity, provided that it's a peaceful expression. It becomes a crime when it takes up violence and killing. Look at Great Britain. How many foreigners make a distinction between Britain, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic. All along you have separatism; your have a monarchy; you have a unitary state just like Thailand, and yet things were not that normal. Sean Connery, a Scottish nationalist, refused to be knighted by the Queen and he turned down the knighthood. So, what's wrong with that? But, eventually, there has to be a devolution of power. After so many centuries of resistance, eventually you have to have a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh National Assembly. You have IRA for over twenty years. I don't know how many tens of thousands have been killed. Eventually you have to talk. And it is a difficult task because, after so many years of violence, this distrust is not something that can be

dissipated overnight. You have to nurture the peace process. You have to change your mindset; you have to change your mentality. So, to me, if we recognize that there is a separatist problem, but it can be dealt with. Yes, there is a terrorist activity, but it has to be addressed and it has to be addressed by ourselves, by our own Government. There is no quick fix.

Chance of Success

I said at the beginning that it is a daunting task, and I cannot promise you the moon, but I will do my best. I have to be an optimist, and I have to be reasonably confident of the prospects of succeeding, otherwise why should I spend my time on a lost cause? But I believe strongly that it is very important to our country and to the future of our country, and I believe that the Thais, whatever their mindsets are, whatever their prejudices are, are pragmatic in times of crises.

The reception that the Commission received from the public in general is overwhelmingly positive. Now, can we change the mindset? I think we can, but it takes a lot of education. We hope to have some kind of a master plan that deals with every aspect of peace building, the need to clear up misunderstanding, the need to be aware of the real issues, the need to recognize and respect the diversity of culture, and the need to change the mindset of the so-called unitary state to something which is more multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. That is going to take a long, long time. The need to respect the ethnicity of the people, the need to know who they are, where they come from, and the respect that we must give to people of different cultures, religions and ethnicity.

I often cite an example; why is it that we feel repugnant that a certain group of our people speak a foreign language, Malay? My response to that question is: why should that be a problem? I admit that it is a problem, particularly with government authorities, and I said if you look around the country, do we have problems with the Thai-Chinese who speak Chinese in Chinatown or some Thai-Chinese who speak Chinese among themselves in their families? Do we have problems with the Thai-Lao who speak Lao in the Northeast? Do we have problems with the Thais who live in Burirum or Prachin Buri who speak Khmer? Do we have any problem with the Northern Thais in Chiang Rai who speak Thai Yai? Do we have any problem with the people in the North who speak a northern dialect? Or those in Isan who speak an Isan dialect? Or those in the South who speak a southern dialect?

All we have to do is just recognize that the so-called Malay language happens to be a regional dialect of the people who live in the three southernmost

provinces. So, within ourselves, within each individual, we have to reconcile all these contradictions and differences in our mind.

You go to any country. The Scots still speak the Scottish dialect; so do the Welsh. I think we are living at a time when every country, every civilized society, finds that there can be unity in diversity and that there is a greater enrichment in our society if there are people of diverse origins, diverse cultures and diverse religions. Somehow, we have to come around that problem. It is a mental block, but we have to come to the realization that the diversity is an asset, not a liability. So you can see that what we are trying to do is not merely to address the issue of the South, but perhaps, I am overly ambitious in considering it a national agenda. It is a truly national reconciliation within our country. In the future, you never know what other problems of a similar nature may occur in other parts of Thailand. So I believe it is incumbent on us, on the present generation, to look ahead and not to take the trees for the forest. We have to have a macro perspective of our national identity, of our national way of doing things, seeing things and solving things. I always say that this is a local issue, as far as the South is concerned. But, what we are trying to do is to get our society better organized in dealing with problems of this nature in the future. I do not believe that it is an impossible task. I look around, I travel a lot, and I visited many countries. I read foreign journals. I watch intelligent TV shows, TV talk shows. I participate in discussions in various fora. I don't see that our problem is greater or more serious than the problems that exist in many other countries.

I lived in the United States for twelve years. When I look around as to what the United States has been doing, I am worried for them. I am already dead scared. But this is not to be taken as an unfavorable view of my good friends, the Americans. If we take a good look around Europe, Africa, and Asia. I do not think that our problems are unique.

What if Thaksin is Leaving as a Prime Minister?

I am not worried about Thaksin leaving or not leaving. I think he has a clear majority, whether you like it or not, he is going to be there for a long time. There is nothing permanent as change. I think people change. I hope he has changed, at best in regard to the issue in the South. And I have no reason to doubt that he is not sincere.

Credibility of the Commission Among Muslim Population

In theoretical terms, I am very, very serious about truth, search for truth, and I personally believe that the reconciliation process must be premised on the

disclosure of truth, on peace and justice, and on human right. The recent history of our country does not give us much assurance that truth and accountability are items of priority interest. But as far I am concerned, and as far as the Commission is concerned, we will continue to urge the Government to be accountable for all these incidents, particularly, the disappearance of a number of Thais. I confronted this question with Khun Thaksin when I had my first meeting with him, and he did not ignore my question. But I think he, at that time, did not place such importance. He said to me: “Yes, we knew about disappearances, but there were no evidences that we could have gone on that.” Of course, there were no evidences that they were perpetrated by people or individuals in official circles.

When I went down south, I was misreported, and misquoted that I asked the people or relatives of the dead and injured to forget the Tak Bai incident. That was a total misinterpretation. What I said to them was that it is imperative that the Government would address the issue of the dead, the missing and the injured. Yes, compensation must be provided. But that is not sufficient because it takes time to engage in a healing process. You take away one life, intentionally or otherwise, then you must ensure that you give the future to the children of the dead and the injured. But at the same time, people must not remain preoccupied with the event, otherwise they will have no future. I told them of my personal experience that I would never forget what I had to go through. It is indelible in my mind, in my heart. But I will not let that unfortunate event in my life bother me or prevent me from carrying on with my life. So it is not that I asked them to forget. I said I would never forget it. It is something which is unforgettable, and you should not forget it. You must try to learn lessons of that event, of that loss and get on with your life.

Recommendations to the Government Regarding the Military’s Role in Security Issues in Southern Thailand and the Reconciliation Process

If Khun Thaksin wants to be true to his words, and if he wants to demonstrate that he is a changed person, and that he adapts himself to the lines of policies that I advocated and still advocate publicly, then, he has to make sure that his people in the Government follow through his instructions. I do not know what instructions he gave, but I give him the benefit of the doubt, and I think he is committed to the statements made public many times that he is a changed person, and he has admitted the failures of his past policies. That is something unusual for a man like Khun Thaksin who is very proud of his achievements, and rightly so. But he admitted that publicly. I think for the first time in five year that he has been in power, he found it possible to admit the failures of the policies and the inefficiency of the management. But he must persuade his people, be they the army people or police or civil servants, to toe

the new line and follow the peaceful resolution method. He has to assure that to the public in the future. I will not change and the direction of the Commission will not change, but I need to enlist his support. I need to enlist his cooperation. I need to enlist his willingness to put his foot down with the authorities under his control. It is as simple as that.

Opposition in the Military or Among the Officials

That is not my problem. If there were any dissenting voices or dissenting statements. It is those people who have problems with the Prime Minister. It is not my problem. They are not accountable to me. They do not work for me and I respect their viewpoints. They can be critical of me and my Commission, but that is not my problem. If they want to say anything, they should say it to the prime Minister.

Is the NRC in Favour of Emergency Law Rather Than Martial Law?

There are three levels of our work. The first level of work is between the Prime Minister and myself. There are certain matters that I do not need to consult the Commission, because it would take up too much time, and there are certain recommendations that I made on my own account, in my own personal capacity. The second level is that there are certain issues discussed with the Commission without any definitive conclusion, particularly in the details. But if I deem it to be of urgency, of great urgency, I would take it up with the Government without waiting for specific conclusions or recommendations of the Commission. The third level is that we have full discussions on the matter within the Commission and we make official recommendations.

Up to now I focus on the first two levels; one-to-one with the Prime Minister, and me as chair having ascertained some viewpoints from the Commission members and I would take it on myself to bring them up with the Government, either with the Prime Minister, with the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Interior, or whoever. Yes, we did discuss the question of martial law. But before we get to the question whether it should be withdrawn or it should be replaced by a less stringent law, I need to point out that the first failure of the authorities is the inability to ensure protection of life in the area, particularly lives of innocent people. I am not trying to say that different lives have different values. But for certain purposes, I think we have two categories, lives of those who work for the Government and lives of innocent people, bystanders or those not involved.

In the past, there had been serious incidents. When I talk about the past, I talk about the past 30-40 years when the targets were mainly Government

officers, be they military, police or civil servants. But, of course, in recent years the target list has been expanded to include innocent people, and that cannot be forgiven, But it boils down to the inability of the Government to provide safety and protection for the innocent people. Besides certain elements in the military and police forces, including civil servants, have been engaged in, shall we say, illegal business activities in the area. I would not be surprised if a number of killings in the South were connected with these illegal activities involving individuals who work in or for the Government.

Having said that, rightly or wrongly, I am not here to pass judgments. The Government felt that the presence of police forces were not sufficient, and there was a need to provide additional assistance to the law-enforcement agencies by bringing in soldiers to the area. According to our law, you cannot move soldiers to any area, unless there is, quote-unquote, martial law. But I said to the Prime Minister the martial law normally in most countries have different levels of crisis. You do not jump from the normality to the martial law in one step. In America, you have national disaster area, or areas whatever, that would enable the states to be provided with federal assistance, for example, when you have hurricanes or cyclones or this or that. If you said that you enforce the martial law, the martial law allows the people involved to do so many things. Khun Thaksin explained to me, and the military too, that they did not apply all the provisions of the martial law. All they needed was a legal provision which would allow them to operate in the South. So, I said to them, in such a case, why did you need a martial law? Why did you not have any other legislation? You have the parliamentary majority! He said that a law would allow the presence of military and that should be sufficient. But I stopped at that because I had no idea that there was another bill waiting in the wings and I do not know what that bill is going to cover, whether it is going to be worse than the martial law or whether it is going to be better. But if the purpose is to enable the introduction of the military forces to do things legally in the South, why not have a new law but confined just to that particular aspect. The danger is, of course, that it could be sort of a mess-up. The new law might expand into something which is, perhaps, more dangerous. I do not know. I do not engage myself in speculations. And if you ask me: cant I trust the military or can I trust the police force? It is not whether I trust them or not. But the people in the area do not trust the Government. They do not trust the military. They do not trust the police force. They do not trust Government civil servants.

It is not for me to say whether such a situation is justified, but the Prime Minister and his Government must be made fully aware. The first time I met him he chided me. He said, I was an old man and he was still youngish. I am a computer illiterate. I still write long-hand when I write my speech. Many years ago, I tried to explain to him and he said “Well, you are not digital, you are

what....analog.” I did not even know what that meant. I had to go up back to look it up in the dictionary. He said “You still think within the old paradigm.” And I pretended I did not know the term, he used the English word. I pretended that I did not know the meaning of the word “paradigm”. So he started to explain to me. He said “You know, the old paradigm is that all these problems arise out of injustices, mistreatments, abuse of power, lack of human rights, bad civil servants, corrupt military and corrupt police forces.” He said it had all changed now, it had all changed. Everything is good. The army is good. The police force is good, everything is good. So, I said to myself, that is not a new paradigm, that is an old paradigm!

But I let it go. I let it go because I have been at the business long enough to know that I have to operate with the result-oriented business management.

Chaturon Chaisang’s Plan

Chaturon’s plan was good. It was not comprehensive, but it was good as far as it went. And if it had been implemented in full eight or nine months ago, we would have had some progress towards, shall we say, a comprehensive reconciliation. As it stands now, it has been shelved. The Government says that quite a number of his recommendations were already implemented. I have no way of monitoring whether those plans or those measures were actually implemented. But we have a larger agenda than Chaturon’s plan because Chaturon’s plan was designed to defuse the explosive situation. In our view, we need to go much further than immediate objectives. We have to focus on long-term objectives.

Devolution of Power

You talked about the devolution. This is a very tricky and very sensitive issue. In every Constitution it is stated that Thailand is a unitary state which is indivisible. So it is subjected to a number of interpretations. Of course, when you say it is indivisible, it means indivisible in terms of territory, which is acceptable to me. The trouble with our country is that our language does not catch up with the current thinking or current concepts. Some of you may know that some 60 – 70 years ago, we had to attempt to coin new Thai words to provide for technical terms in science, particularly in modern living. Prince Wan, who was our Foreign Minister, coined many words to cover the political science terms, and he found that he had to resort to the use of Pali and Sanskrit words. Many of the words he coined, are, I would say, unintelligible to the common people. Words like “territorial integrity” he coined, I am sure my daughter doesn’t know that either. The Thai word for “Territorial Integrity” is ^๔ รั้วพรมแดน ^๕ รั้วพรมแดน . I challenge any Thai here who is not in the foreign service

to understand such word. In the Thai language the dividing line between “honesty” and “integrity” just does not exist. So, sometimes, he had to coin words which are very long. We do not have a word for integrity even though some may have tried to refer to it by the word ^๑ อุดมคติ , which is not the exact meaning.

We were so successful in coining new words that India had to send her Pali/Sanskrit experts to learn from us. For example, you have in English “telephone”, “television”, “telecommunication”. For “Tele”, Prince Wan once used the term “tora”. So, telephone is “torasap”. “Sap” means to hear. Television is “torathas”. “Thas”, means to see. Telecommunication is “toracommanacom”. So, there are some wonderful words that had been coined. But when it comes to more abstract terms for modern living or concepts, we have difficulties. When you talk about devolution, I do not know how the word devolution can be translated into Thai. But leave it aside. We must not use terms or words which could be, I would not say misinterpreted, but I would say would be distorted by the ultra-rightists, or by the extremists. Many times in my life apart from being accused of being a Communist, I have been accused of being a separatist. When we were drafting the Constitution, I was accused of reducing the King’s constitutional power. So, it is nothing new. But when it comes to words like “self-rule” or “autonomy”, we do not have proper translations into Thai. The moment you try to explain to a Thai the word “autonomy”, he would say “Ah, that’s independence”.

So, I warned my Commission members not to bring up this subject publicly yet. But we have to start thinking seriously as to how we could bring justice, as to how we could bring recognition of cultures and ethnicity to our national life. We can only talk about the distribution of power in accordance with the Constitution. That is a by-word, other wise we would be wrongly accused. We cannot use the term “autonomy” because there is no word for “autonomy” in Thai, and if you use the word “autonomy”, people will say you are talking about independence of the three southernmost provinces. And even the term “self-rule” can also be distorted. So, for the time being, I would say, yes, the direction would be along that line.

I think, in a way, if you look at the history of Thailand, unfortunately, we are victims of our own successes. We have history, recorded events, but we do not have history books which explain why such and such events took place, and what impact or what consequences came after those events. During King Narai’s reign in Ayudhya, we had a Prime Minister who was a Greek named Falcon, and the highest courtier in the Ayudhya Dynasty was a descendant of Sheik Ahmed from Persia. And we had a Chinese, a high-ranking mandarin at the court. But after that we forgot who we were and where we came from.

During the drafting of the Constitution, I was very much criticized and, I would say, vilified for being a part of the movement to stop the public call for making Buddhism the state religion. I think it is important that we have to think about the need of the people in the area to be able to govern themselves. If it is a federal structure, it is easier. The Brits have left many bad legacies after their departure. The Chinese often say that wherever the Brits went, and when they left, they made such a mess. They should have made Burma into a federal state. They left India, subcontinent India, in such a big mess too, not to talk about what they left in China after the Opium War.

So you can blame the legacies of the past colonialism, western colonialism. We do not forget history, but what can we learn from history? Definitely, Thailand cannot be a federal structure. It is a unitary structure. But we can distribute power; we can give authority following the principles of governance, principles of participation. They should have certain powers to administer. You can leave the defence, you can leave foreign affairs, you can leave security, to the central government. But that is, perhaps, the direction that we may have to think to take in the future if we can get consensus.

We, unfortunately, are victims of our successes because we had been able all along to assimilate the Chinese, assimilate the Lao, assimilate the Khmer, assimilate the Mon. And 50 – 60 years ago, there was a Government that wanted to assimilate the Thai Malays. But circumstances are different. When the Chinese came here, they came without their wives; they fled from poverty and impoverishment. They left their wives back home. They came here, they looked like the Thais; they married the Thais. After three generations, they are more Thai than the Thais themselves. We assimilated the Lao, the Khmers, some Burmans. We cannot follow the same path to assimilate the Thai Malays. We have to integrate them. We cannot translate the word “to integrate” the people into our national life. So, we do have problems with the language.

Composition of NRC

Out of forty-nine, I included six politicians and a Member of Parliament in Yala who is a Buddhist. There were 18 – 19 persons from the area. There were about sixteen Muslims, so I included two or three Buddhists from the area. I think the Democrats are well represented. But mind you, I did not choose them because of their party label. I chose them in their individual capacities and basis. It is not a problem of one political party, but it is a national problem that we have to tackle.

Question : You mentioned earlier that you felt better intelligence and better law-enforcement were needed. I was wondering whether you could expand on

that a little bit. How is it possible after such a long period of protracted, if low-level, violence that the governing authorities only seem to have the vaguest idea and contradictory ideas about who is responsible and have caught so few people for the multiple attacks that have taken place? How can the police and the army be doing such a bad job?

Better Intelligence and Better Law Enforcement

I told you that the intelligence is very weak. You asked me how to improve it. I cannot answer because I am not familiar with the organization. I am not, and I have no authority to speak on behalf of the intelligence people.

What Went Right During Your time on Intelligence. What do You Think has Changed in that Time?

I hope you do not take my response seriously. But I can tell you that in my short stint, even twice, in my lifetime as Prime Minister, the first time for about fifteen months, or sixteen months, and the second time for four months, I ignore all intelligence.

How to Handle or Reconcile If the root cause of the Violence is Unknown?

You do not need much intelligence. Either way, to know the root causes of the problem, I would rather use individual intelligence and collective intelligence, not the intelligence you are referring to.

NRC's Mandate : A Complete Roadmap for Government?

I was hoping, and I am still hoping that, by the end of this evening, my initial statements and my answers to your questions would clear any doubts in your minds as to what our mandate is, and what our responsibilities are. There is a clear dichotomy between what the Government has to do and what we are planning to do. Some of the questions that were posed to me tonight could be directly addressed to the Prime Minister, partly to put a pressure on him to ensure that his current moves and his current policies would be in line with the long-term approach of the work of the Commission. Obviously, there is still a lot of misconception as to what we are supposed to do, what we are about to do, and what we are capable of doing.

I did stress many times that we are not a law-enforcement agency. We are not an intelligence community. We have no executive authority. So, if people come to me and ask : why is it that the Commission has been set up for three months now and there seems to be no improvement of the situation? My answer

would be : that has nothing to do with the Commission. The question should be addressed to the Government. All I want to ensure is that the Government is now working in tandem with us. I cannot force the Government to do anything or to carry out any interim measures. I am not accountable to the Government, but I am accountable to the people in Thailand at the end of the day.

My Commission cannot be held responsible for or accountable to a day-to-day event, to any explosion, or to any killing or whatever incident. It is an obvious commentary on the efficiency of the policy or on the validity of the policy and efficiency of management of the Government authorities, in its inability to dispose of the unrest in the South. I am sorry if you feel that my answer is something that you are not looking for, but I think you have to know the limits of our Commission. We are not the Government! Many of the questions posed to me by the Thai press and by some of you here could be better addressed to the Prime Minister or to the Government authorities.

Public Participation and Support on Reconciliation

Yes, and I even asked my Commission members to go around the country and talk to the people at private or public fora. I encouraged Commission members to write articles, to talk to as many people as possible, not only in the South, but all the rest of the country. My whole intention is to somehow generate a kind of debate that we had when we were drafting the Constitution. When I was given the opportunity to chair the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, I made sure that it would be a transparent exercise, and it had to involve the participation of the people. So, from the very first day, I declared that our meetings would be public. Press people or anybody could walk in to our meeting rooms and listen to the whole discourse. We had many meetings for six or seven months.

There was only one off-the-record meeting and confidential session. It was when we debated among ourselves the pros and cons of making Buddhism a state religion, because it was such a sensitive topic that we did not want our discussions to be misconstrued.

This time I was also thinking of that type of open discussion, but I am afraid that there are quite a number of issues which would be too sensitive to let in the public from the beginning. But, indirectly, I would encourage open debates. You will find that not only I, but a few other member who may disagree with me on certain points, would speak up and would write articles. You can read articles in the newspapers “Matichon” or “Phoochadkarn”, or whatever.

My whole idea is that the success of the Commission is not on the report. The success of the Commission would be on the positive reception, acceptance and support of the public of our report. Only then would the Government move. And I am talking about any Government. I do not believe that this issue is a unique one in Thailand, and I do not view it as an issue that involves only the people, the two million people in the South. I view it as an issue that has to be debated and has to be discussed and resolved by consensus by the entire society. That is how I view the seriousness of the issue. And in this, I need the support of the objective press, of the factual press, and I do not want to see the press engage in sensational or in exaggerated versions of the true events.

Outsider Influences on the Southern Violence

The Causes of the Southern Violence

I shall answer the longer question first. I think the attention that the Thai public paid to the situation in the South is the direct result of the failure of the policies. I think there are misunderstandings and misperceptions of the causes. The Thais are very gullable people. They are very simplistic and, they tend to be swayed very easily one way or the other by propaganda or by rumors, or by plain lies. It is not a society which is given to search for the truth. I think that if I were to identify flaws of our character, it is not a society, it is not a learned society. It is not a society which is determined to search for truth, at least not as a matter of conscience or principle. So, on the other hand, the upside of this lack of curiosity for truth is that they can also be swayed more easily if we can get the truth up to them. It is an arduous task, but it is still a possibility.

To come back to your first question, you have to identify what you mean by “outsiders”? Distant outsiders or near outsiders? Well, I deal with the near outsiders first. The near outsiders, of course, are our neighbouring countries, those with a large Muslim population. I have full confidence in the policies of the Government of Malaysia including that of the Prime Minister, and their authorities, and that includes also the PAS government in Kelantan too. I have full confidence that they would not do anything intentionally to harm or to add injury to the already bad situation in the South, or to harm the long-term interest of Thailand. Definitely, they have certain viewpoints and, perhaps, they have different ways of dealing with the problem of a similar nature if it were to occur in their countries. But the advantage they have over us is that they are a Muslim nation, or the majority are Muslims and they have a Government which is Muslim. So, they have more leeway in dealing with the Muslim problems and in many cases, in a much more straight-forward and much more, I would say, strict manner than we can afford because we are a Buddhist Government. Anything we do could be easily misinterpreted as being harsh on the Muslim minority.

But the paradox of the situation is that here you have three southernmost provinces with two million people and with roughly 1.7 or 1.8 Muslims. So, they are a majority in the area, and yet they live in the country in which Muslims are not a majority. And yet, again, they live in a region, Southeast Asia region, of which, the Muslims are a majority. So, you have to strike a good balance.

In whatever treatment we deal with the question, we can not proceed on the basis that we have to be favourable to one group or the other, or to be partial, to please on group or the other. We have to be seen to have a balance set of policy measures and to be objective with our exercise. So we are walking on a tight rope.

Dissolvment of the SPBC

I think that the issue was magnified out of proportion. Yes, there were people who regretted the fact that the old Unit, whatever the acronym, was dissolved and a new Unit was formed. But I can assure you that there are not much differences between the two Units. And I talked to the person who would know because I talked to the chief of the old Unit and he said he regretted it was dissolved. The new Unit could also be a replacement. I do not think it is that serious. More has to do with the way the people in the area operate. Definitely, for whatever reasons, they were still not able to regain the trust of the people in the field, and it is difficult to pass judgement on the situation which prevailed a year ago, three years ago, four years ago.
