

01/02/2001

The sky's the limit

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ANANDA Krishnan is perhaps the country's leading New Economy strategist. His Maxis Communications Bhd is Malaysia's fastest growing mobile telephone operator, while his Astro is the country's only satellite television station.

The jewels in Ananda's empire are unlisted. But that is because of his business style - to nurture a business to ripeness before realising its value by flipping it over to the stock exchange. Ananda's vision and connections help him spot business opportunities way ahead of his contemporaries.

He is not a computer nerd but has the ability to grasp technical matters relating to the telecommunications and IT sector. Associates describe him as a man who can go through a 200-page technical report within hours and critically comment on it.

The son of a civil servant, Ananda spent his younger days in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, before reading economics at Melbourne University and proceeding to a Master's at Harvard. It is said that he found friends in Harvard who later paved the way for him to make his first million.

Ananda made his early fortunes through international oil trading. It is said that Sheikh Yamani Ahmad Zaki Yamani, the former Saudi Arabian Oil Minister, was an old Harvard acquaintance.

Ananda's oil business and superb connections opened the way for him to set up businesses all over the world. His petroleum trading skills caught the attention of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who roped him in as director of Petronas between 1984 and 1986.

In the 1990s, Ananda ventured into property development. His achievements include the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC), the shimmering twin towers hailed as the world's tallest buildings.

Ananda started planning for Malaysia's first satellite in 1991, finally launching it in 1996. Now he has two Measat satellites in orbit and plans for a third.

Ananda's main private vehicle is Usaha Tegas Sdn Bhd which has a 40 per cent stake in Measat Broadcast Network Systems, the operator of Astro which is fast expanding into other parts of the region.

Ananda's business interests stretch from Japan to the Philippines and the United States. A brother helps him run the Philippine business, said to be in oil trading and entertainment.

In Malaysia, besides Maxis and Astro, Ananda's investments are in gaming and energy. He is the dominant shareholder in Tanjong Bhd, one of the four gaming companies in the country. A few years ago he ventured into electricity supply through Powertek Bhd.

A workaholic, the 62-year-old Ananda is said to be a demanding employer. He does not run the day-to-day operations of his companies but provides directions. He does not sit on their boards but attends to important technical meetings. He does not give public interviews but his wealth and achievements speak volumes of his ability and vision.

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