



His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej
1927 - 2016

KINGDOM GRIEVES

THE LIFE AND WORK OF HIS MAJESTY KING BHUMIBOL

No one in the history of the Kingdom of Thailand has done so much to improve the well-being of its people as His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, also known as Rama IX. He has initiated literally thousands of development projects that have greatly benefited the country and its people. His reign spanned the terms of more than 30 governments, several military regimes, coups and numerous coup attempts, and even the defeat of the communist threat that raged through Southeast Asia a few decades

WIDE ANGLE DESK

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"We shall reign with righteousness for the benefits and happiness of the Siamese people."

THIS declaration, spoken by His Majesty at his coronation ceremony was his first public pledge to promote the welfare of all his subjects. Throughout his 65-year reign he has fulfilled this promise to the letter. Early on His Majesty was inspired by the example of his parents to work tirelessly to improve the lives of the Thai people. Although most of his childhood was spent in the West, he was taught to be aware of his roots and his debt to the motherland. This attitude formed a solid foundation for a deep understanding of Thai society.

In the early days of his reign His Majesty made many visits to rural areas throughout Thailand. Accompanied by Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, His Majesty visited the least developed areas of the country to see how the people lived. The royal couple travelled to every part of the country, visiting villagers and learning of their living conditions, problems and needs at first hand.

His Majesty would then begin the process of devising schemes and projects to resolve their troubles and improve their condition. Scenes of His Majesty sitting on the ground or standing shoulder to shoulder with his subjects, engaged in conversation, became a familiar sight that touched all Thai people.

To His Majesty, the people's problems are also his, and so he has never stopped striving to make their lives better. It is for that reason the people proclaimed their King "Father of the Nation" and the monarchy has become a rock solid institution, enshrined firmly in the hearts of the Thai people.

His Majesty truly deserves to be called the Developer King for his dedication to alleviating the people's hardships and improving their quality of life.

Royal Development Projects

The Royal Development Projects (RDPs) were directly inspired by the insight His Majesty gained while visiting rural areas. He realized that any projects that truly improved the lives of the people must go hand in hand with protection of the environment and sustainable use of natural resources.

The first initiative to help people was initiated in 1951, when His Majesty authorized the Department of Fisheries to acquire Tilapia mosambica fish from Penang through the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. The fish were initially raised in the pond at the Ambarra Villa of the Dusit Palace in Bangkok. On November 7, 1953, His Majesty distributed the fingerlings to village and district leaders throughout the country for propagation and further distribution among the rural people in order to provide them with an alternative source of protein.

The first RDP which directly emphasized rural development emerged in 1952 when His Majesty donated a number of bulldozers to the Naresuan Border Patrol Police unit for construction of a road leading to Huai Mongkol Village in Hua Hin district of Prachuap Khiri Khan province. This was to enable the villagers to easily commute and transport their produce for sale in markets outside the village.

Since 1952, His Majesty initiated more than 3,000 innovative programmes in agriculture, environment, public health, water resources, communications, public welfare, occupational pro-

motion and education with the aim of easing the lives of Thai people. Some of the most important are as follows:

Royal Rain Project

His Majesty is often associated with life-giving rain because of his pioneering work in cloud seeding techniques. Since 1971, the methods he developed have been used to bring drought relief to farmers and to increase water reservoirs, earning international patents and interest from foreign countries.

Moisture Retention Dams

To maximize the use of Thailand's annual monsoon rains, His Majesty designed a system of small "check-dams," which regulate the flow of water. The creation of multiple small reservoirs gives farmers immediate benefits and also replenishes groundwater.

Royal Projects

In 1969, the King introduced a comprehensive program to assist northern hill tribe people engaged in unsustainable farming practices. By training the hill tribe communities in the production of various handicrafts, these programs have raised their income and their prospects, and at the same time have benefited the environment.

Pa Sak Jolasid Dam Project

To help the farmers of Thailand's central plains to exploit fully the waters of the Pa Sak River, His Majesty initiated a development project that created a new reservoir for water conservation and controlled irrigation. The dam has also helped with flood prevention on the outskirts of Bangkok.

New Theory on Managing Agricultural Land

Combining concepts of water management with local control, His Majesty

developed a strategy that promotes individual household reservoirs over large communal ones, maximizing versatility while minimizing costs. Overall agricultural production is boosted without the need for public funds.

Use of Vetiver to Prevent Soil Erosion

To help stop the effects of soil erosion, the King initiated a program to plant certain varieties of vetiver grass, known for its ability to reduce siltation and stabilize soil. The systematic application of the program has proven effective in maximizing productivity and conserving precious water.

The Chaipattana Aerator

Concerned with the quality of water in the Kingdom, His Majesty developed a device that keeps water oxygenated and healthy. Its simple design and low cost make it easy to build and maintain, thus facilitating wide application nationwide.

Pak Phanang Project

To stem the deterioration of the naturally fertile Pak Phanang River basin due to unmanaged population growth, His Majesty initiated co-operation between government agencies to use more effective agricultural resources, maximize economic gain, and reduce harmful environmental practices.

Renewable Energy

Long before the need for renewable biofuels was widely apparent, His Majesty was actively researching the resource potential of locally-made palm oil. The resulting biodiesel has become a standard additive in the nation's fuel, and its local sourcing is an inspiration for ongoing research.



The King inspecting a Green Initiative project.



Two women offering gifts to The King.



The King takes a walk through a farmland.

HOW KING BHUMIBOL SHAPED MODERN THAILAND

King Bhumibol Adulyadej's pivotal role in modern Thailand's development tends to obscure the fact that when he acceded to the throne in 1946, the status of the monarchy was not secure, and the young king himself was unprepared to take on the job.

Until 1932 Thailand had been ruled by an absolute monarchy, with the king exercising power over the judiciary, the appointment of government officials and over state policy.

But the pressures of the modern, globalised world intruded in 1932 when a group of soldiers and intellectuals overthrew the absolute monarchy and imposed a constitution limiting the powers of King Prajadhipok, on the throne at the time. Unable to accept these limitations he abdicated in 1935 and lived the rest of his life in exile.

A young monarch Bhumibol's elder brother, Ananda Mahidol, was next in line, but their mother insisted they stay away from the volatile political climate in Thailand and they were brought up in Switzerland.

As a result there was no sitting king until the family returned after World War Two in 1945 and it was not clear then what kind of monarchy might be re-established.

Following the still unexplained shooting to death of King Ananda on 9 June 1946, that task fell to the 18 year-old Bhumibol.

Royal roles Until the mid 1950s the king's position was still too insecure for him to challenge the then-military strongman Phibul Songkram, who had also ruled during the war. He was not even allowed to travel freely outside Bangkok. From the mid-1950s on, the king



The couple went on to have four children, but are pictured here in 1955 with Prince Vajiralongkorn and Princess Ubol Ratana.

travelled widely, and took an active interest in rural development projects.

How effective his interventions really were is difficult to gauge, given the swirl of royalist propaganda, but they certainly established him as a caring ruler who was working hard for his people.

Anti-communist figure

Today the monarch is expected to be involved in the country's development, and substantial resources have been devoted to promoting King Bhumibol's philosophy of a "sufficiency economy" - a focus on balanced development that stresses environmental and social responsibilities as much as conventional measures of economic progress.

From the mid 1960s, when central government authority was challenged in

the countryside by a communist rebellion, the king's visits helped rebuff the influence of the insurgents.

King Bhumibol became an essential figure in the fight by the Thai military and its US-backers against communism, although his role became more controversial in the savage anti-leftist coup of 1976, in which dozens of students were brutally killed by the security forces and royal-backed militias, and thousands forced to flee to seek sanctuary with the Communist Party.

Throughout his reign King Bhumibol worked with a series of military-dominated administrations, prompting accusations that he was more comfortable with authoritarian than democratically-elected regimes.

The role of mediator

Critics, though, believe he shared the disdain for elected politicians held by many of Thailand's traditional elite, as money-grubbing, classless opportunists.

In interviews the king referred to politics as something unseemly with which he did not want to be associated.

One other side of Bhumibol's role was often talked about during his reign, as a mediator at times of crisis. Officially he could not intervene. But on two occasions, in 1973 and 1992, when bloody clashes between troops and protestors had taken place on the streets of Bangkok, he is credited with defusing the situation and allowing a compromise to be settled.

In 1973 he decided to allow protesting students to shelter inside his palace, undermining then dictator Thanom and forcing him into exile.

This allowed the formation of Thailand's first democratic government since the 1940s, although this brief period ended tragically in the violence and repression of 1976.

In 1992 the king mediated again, summoning a military-backed prime minister and the leader of the protest movement, and allowing video of them prostrating themselves before him to be broadcast. Following this, Thailand had enjoyed its longest period of democracy, up to the coup of 2006.

There is debate about how decisive the king's role was in these crises, but the incidents allowed him to be portrayed as the ultimate arbiter of disputes.



The King (left) with his brother in 1935 in Switzerland.



The grainy footage broadcast from the Royal Palace in Bangkok on 20 May 1992 with a group of men in suits may not seem all that significant, but for many it represented a pivotal moment in Thai history. One of the men in the video is Gen Suchinda Kraprayoon, who had earlier mounted a coup and been appointed prime minister of Thailand. The other, Chamlong Srimuang, had led a popular pro-democracy uprising against Gen Kraprayoon's military control.