



In Remembrance of His Majesty  
King Bhumibol Adulyadej

# URBAN AFFAIRS

B A N G K O K



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## Editor's Letter

When I was young, every December 5, my grandmother would tell me, my little brother and sister to gather round the TV, each with a candle in hand waiting to sing the King's Royal Anthem along with the Prime Minister and the rest of the country. We felt a little goofy every time, teasing each other and trying to avoid having our hands burnt by the candle's tears. But when the song started, we sang in unison with all our hearts.

We were young, but we knew that for the King we all loved and who loved us, this was the best we could do to wish him well. And so we crooned with our best wishes for the monarch and the royal family. Today, the love and loyalty remains, but whenever I hear the royal anthem there is this sadness and longing feeling, and I have to try hard to hold back my tears.

People say you need to see to believe. We can see His Majesty's love and dedication through the thousands of development projects across the nation initiated and overseen by him to improve the well-being of the people. He visited every province and suggested ways to build or improve the Kingdom's infrastructure to help his subjects such as dams, village roads, irrigation systems and even access to electricity in remote villages.

In my advancing years, I got to witness his role as a catalyst for change on various occasions that were televised nationally. The Kingdom watched as the monarch publicly put an abrupt end to the bloody confrontation during the Black May of 1992 by asking all sides to find a peaceful solution. During the 1997 financial crisis, he taught us to look back at what we have and learn his wisdom of self-sufficiency. He was especially concerned about water-related crises including floods and droughts. We know he worked hard every day for 70 years during his reign for the betterment of his people. This is why Thais love their monarchy with all their hearts.

Of millions of pictures of King Bhumibol adorning the walls of Thai households, offices and buildings, my favorite one was taken by chief royal photographer Anat Bunnag on one hot, sunny day in November, 1955. During His Majesty's first trip to Thailand's Northeast, or Isan, he was scheduled to visit several places including a small village in Nakhonpanom province. Tum Chantanit, a 102-year-old grandma who had heard about the King's visit to her village, brought along three pink lotus flowers, but had to wait patiently by the roadside from early in the morning to the afternoon, hoping to catch a glimpse of the King.

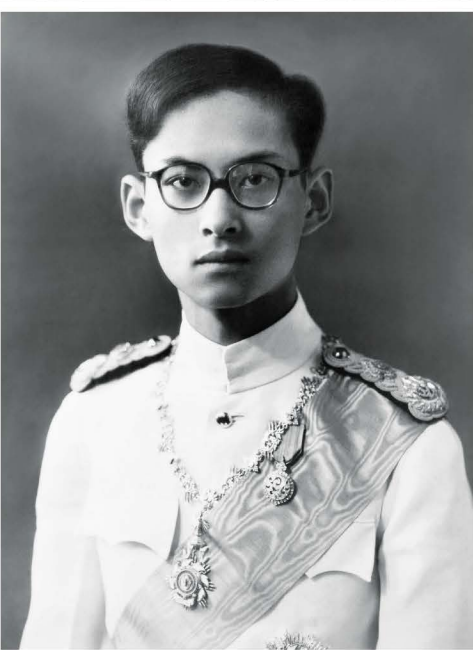
By the time the King arrived, the flowers had withered in the scorching sun. When the King came over to the spot where she was sitting, the old woman raised her flowers above her head as a gesture of respect. The King bent down, smiled and touched her hand. It was a beautiful, yet private moment: the old woman showing her love for the King and her loving King reciprocating. No one knew what His Majesty said to the old woman, but anyone who sees this picture can see and sense the kind of pure selflessness, love and compassion that can only come from someone who truly cares.

I am proud to say I was born in and lived under the reign of King Rama IX. This year has been a year of mourning and the mourning will not end soon. People ask what they can do to commemorate his passing. There are many ways to express our love and loyalty to our beloved King, and we can start by following in his footsteps, studying his teachings, leading our lives along the lines of His Majesty's self-sufficiency philosophy, loving one another, and dedicating our lives to the betterment of others. Only by doing so, his royal legacies will live through us and remain with all Thais forever.

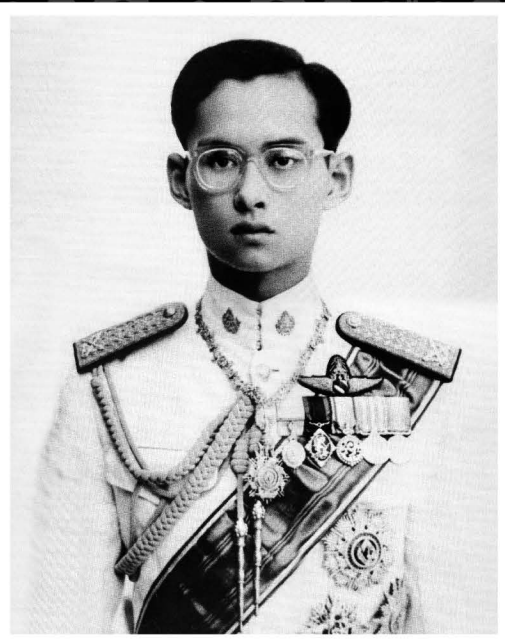
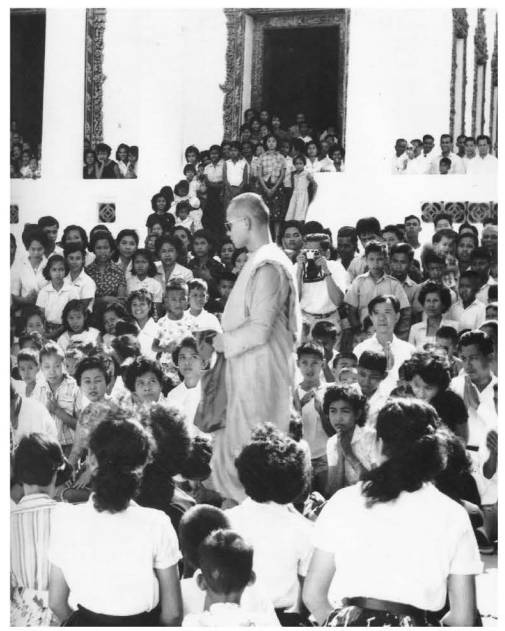
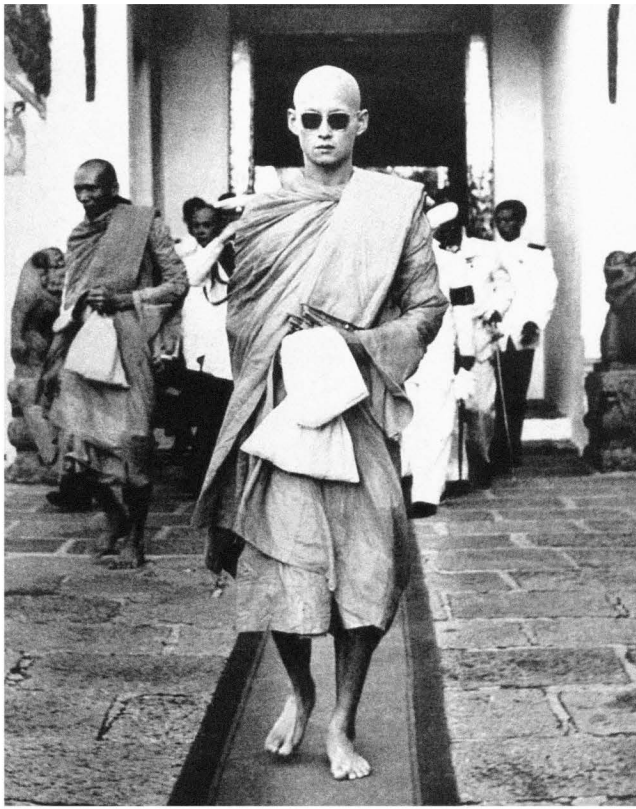
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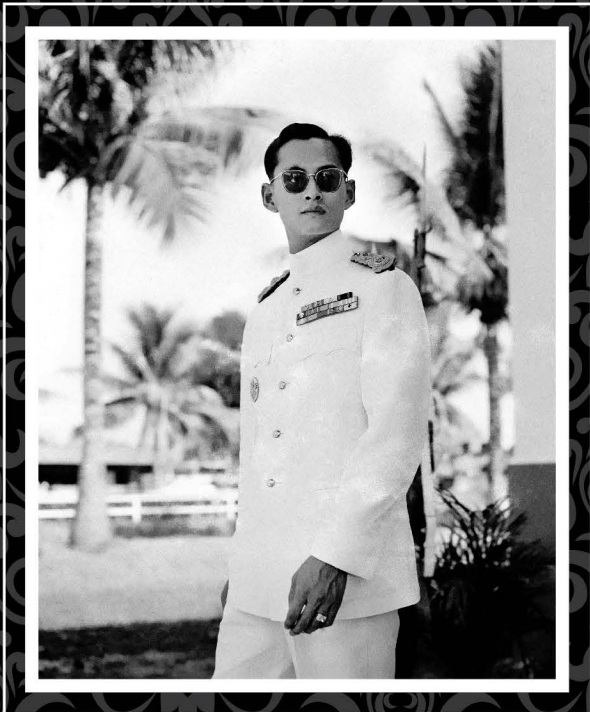
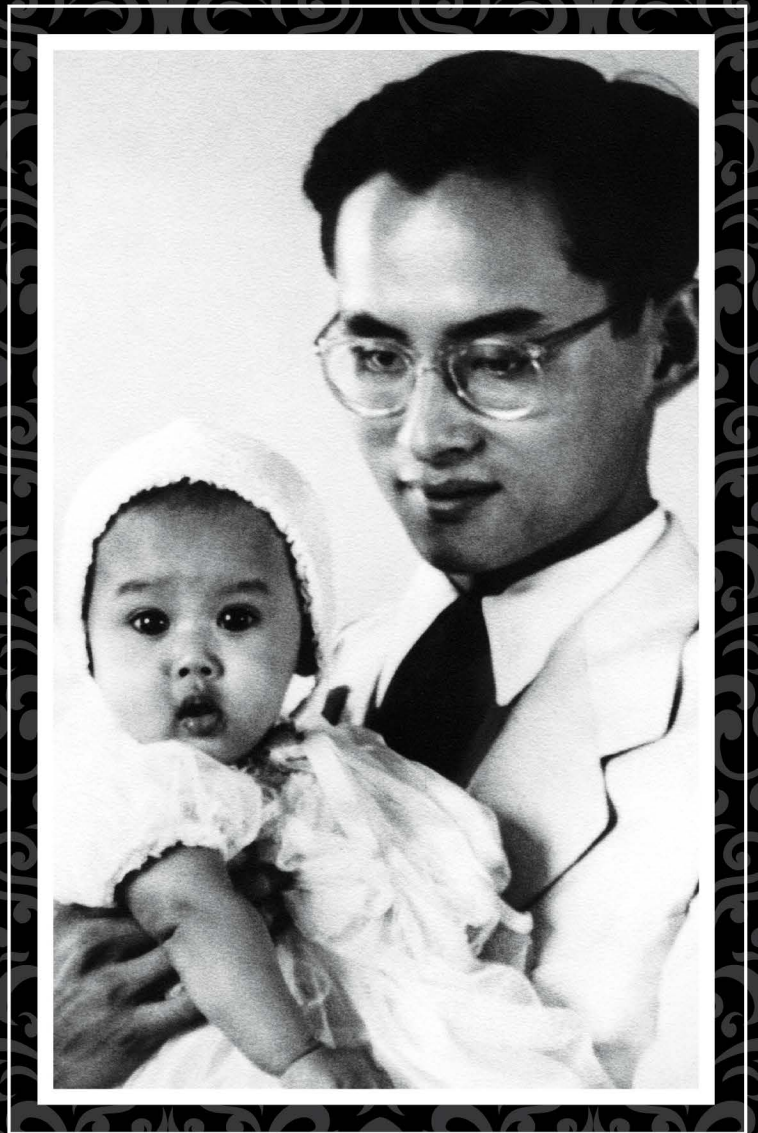
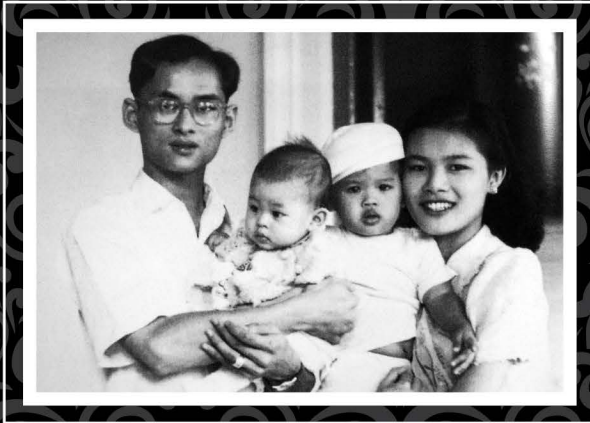
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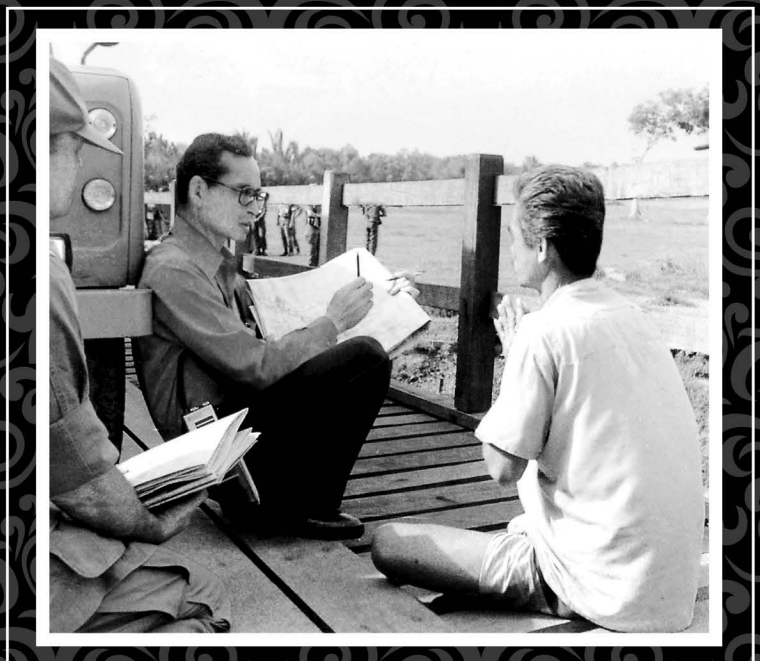
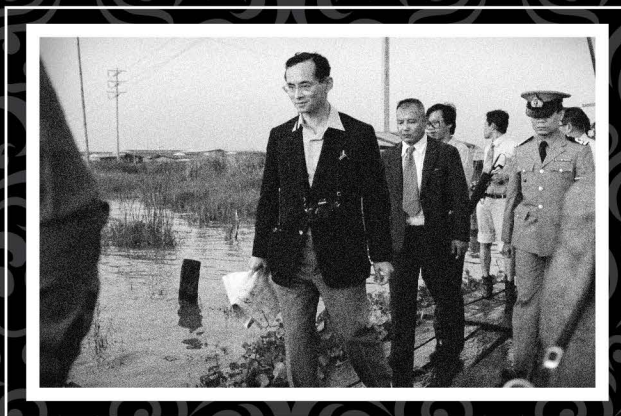


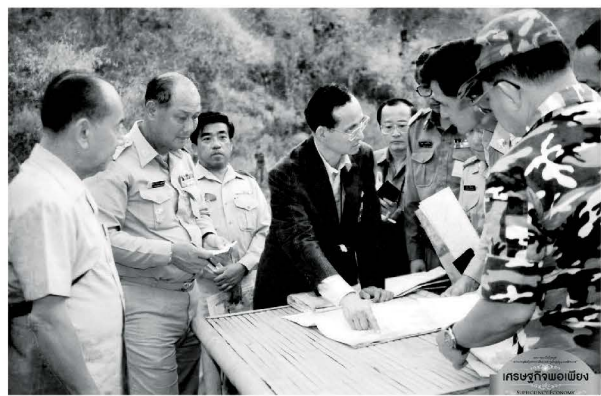














# Once in a lifetime as a civil servant

BY J. PAKCHUEN

Growing up in Thailand, I had always wanted to be a civil servant. At the age of 24 and beyond my expectations, I landed a job as a civil servant at the Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary located in the Grand Palace compound in Bangkok. This was one of the main royal organizations that served His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej by completing different secretarial work for his royal projects.

I was based at His Majesty's Personal Affairs Division whose main responsibility was to seek approvals from King Bhumibol for the multitude of requests from his subjects. My responsibility was to liaise between the petitioners and the executive staff who would then address the requests directly with the King. Most of the petitions involved asking for his gracious kindness to approve requests for the use of his name for a variety of social and sporting occasions or events such as granting a royal trophy for a local sports event or a request to use his official designation as the offeror of the royal Kathina robes to be used for the Kathina Ceremony (the Buddhist robes offering ceremony).

During the first few months I had initially thought that most of the work might be done through this office alone without the King directly involved. But things worked out quite differently. Eventually a few instances made me understand how close King Bhumibol was to his subjects, and not least his unmatched attention to detail.

## Office Faux Pas

Before becoming a civil servant, I was not a detail-oriented person. But upon joining His Majesty's Personal Affairs Division, I knew I had to perform my assigned duties with scrupulous attention to detail. I remember having to type an official letter to be sent out by the Division to communicate with petitioners on behalf of the King. These letters needed to be proofread time and again, with our zero tolerance for typos of any kind. There were three sheets of paper, so I used a paper clip to hold them together. Instead of clipping it the right way with the part of the upper tongue with a bended end facing up, I did it the other way round.

I did not even notice the apparent anomaly until two of my senior coworkers pointed it out. While suggesting that I should have handled it with care, both proclaimed: "The King knows the difference." The King once sent a letter containing a few slips back to a civil servant for revision per his instructions. This is because if we clip it the wrong way, with the bended end facing the paper, it might tear the paper when pull out. After that incident, I became more careful with the documentation I was going to submit, knowing that any one of my works could end up being on his desk.

## Photography Competition

Sometimes there were unusual or new requests such as a photography competition where it was important that the judgment be based solely on the King's decision. We prepared the petition package and sent it up to the executive team. I had never thought we would hear anything special about it, but a few weeks later, we received the package back with the King's own handwritten comments on the winning picture!

After picking the best picture for this competition, the King advised the photographer how he could have made the picture look better, suggesting that the photographer crop out about five centimeters of the bottom edge of the picture so that the focus would be on the center of the picture. We were thrilled about his artistic flair and his personal touches. And yes, I never felt closer to the King than at that very moment.



## A Heart to Heart Letter

My last story is one that always gives me great pride and joy. It was my fifth month at His Majesty's Personal Affairs Division and his birth anniversary on December 5 was drawing near. It was the busiest time of the year because we had to make preparations for the birthday celebrations. As part of the administrative desk I helped sort out piles of correspondence sent in by well-

wishers from across the country and found time to read some of them. That day I realized what it meant when people said that the King was the center of the people's hearts.

Particularly touching was a letter from a 10-year-old girl from the countryside handwritten with a small heart-shaped drawing in it. The content revealed her loyalty and the love she had towards the King whom she called "Royal Father". She mentioned how generous, merciful and sacrificial the King was to help her and her family, and the country overall. She expressed her determination to be a good student and, when grown-up, a good person who would work hard for the country just like the King. I cried reading the letter; the message was so sincere and I knew it came from the bottom of her heart.

My one-and-a-half-year stint as a civil servant serving King Bhumibol has changed me significantly and even created a new me. I am grateful to have been born in Thailand in the reign of King Bhumibol. We all have witnessed how hard he worked for us. But having seen that with my own eyes is more meaningful than anything else. I have learned so much from my experience there and the pride to have once worked for him and the many good lessons learned will stay with me forever.





# Ascension to Heaven

BY NAAM SOMBATANANTAKORN

For every life on earth, death is the transformation from tangible to intangible; in other words, from flesh to soul. To put this transformation concept into practice, all religions and beliefs have come up with their own funeral procedures, rituals, or ceremonies. This month we will witness the royal rituals and ceremonies surrounding the royal cremation of the late and much-loved monarch, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX).

In Thailand, it's our belief that we are a truly multicultural society that's a harmonious blend of colorful customs and traditions. In terms of religion, Buddhism has been practiced in Thailand for centuries. Yet, because Buddhism shares the same roots as Brahminism and Hinduism in India and Sri Lanka, it's hard to deny that we have also incorporated some of the Hindu concepts into our religious practice over the years. Like any other religion, we do believe in the afterlife, and in hell and heaven.

The Thai monarchy is substantially influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist concepts of cosmology. A monarch is considered a demi-god and a reincarnation of a Hindu god, and an avatar of Rama, Vishnu, Shiva or Indra (the lord of heavens) who has a divine right to rule his Kingdom and protect his people. When his mission is fulfilled, he will return to heaven. Thus, when a king passes away,

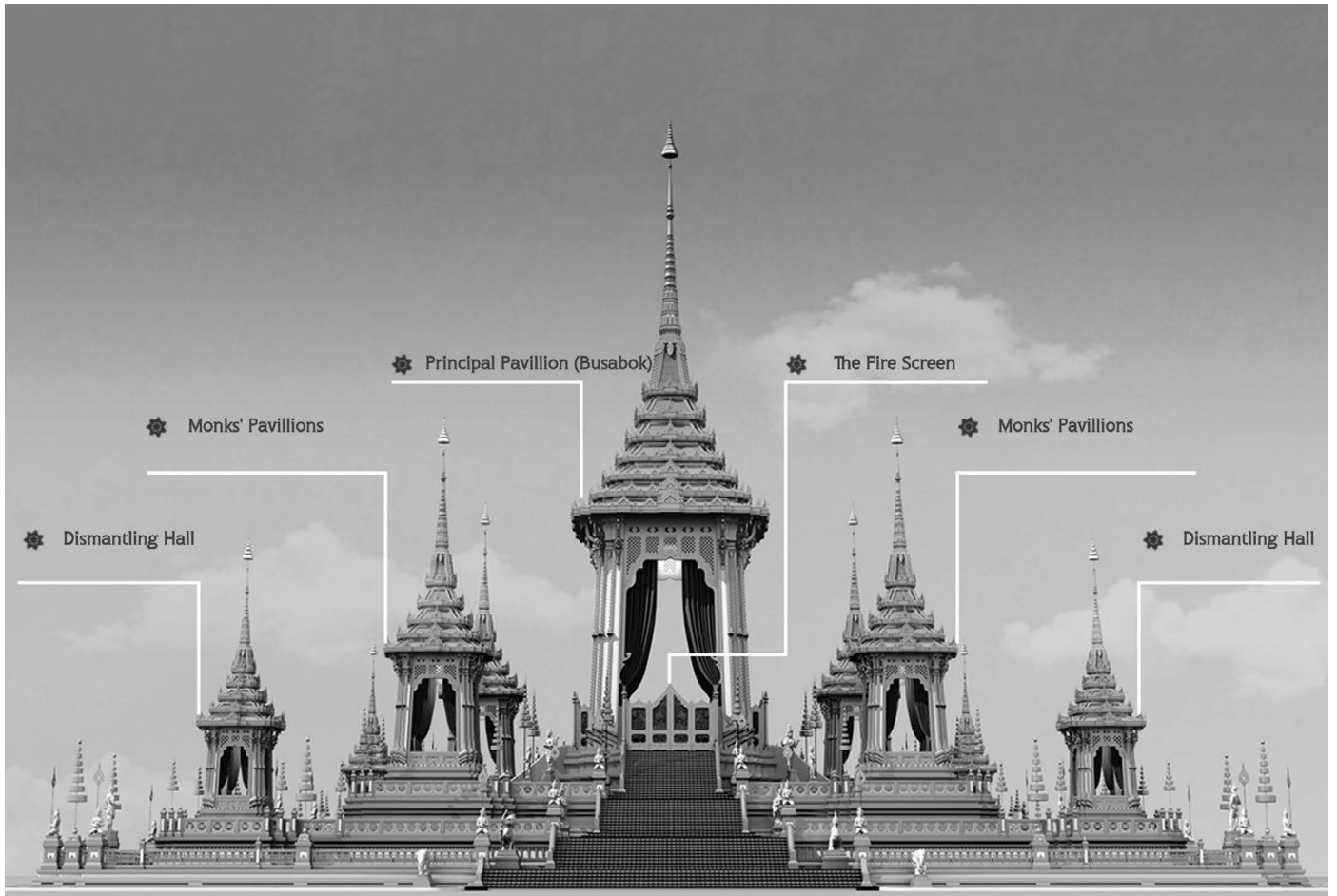
we prepare the path for his ascension to heaven amid elaborate ceremonies and rituals.

According to *Traibhumikatha* (The Three Worlds of Existence), one of Thai Buddhism's religious texts written in 1345 by King Lithai, the fifth Sukhothai king of the Phra Ruang dynasty, the universe is divided into three planes of existence or "realms": the immaterial realm (*arupa-loka*), the fine-material realm (*rupa-loka*) and the sensuous realm (*kama-loka*).

It is within the sensuous realm that the underworld, the human world, and the world of devas – hell, earth, and heaven – exist. At the core of the universe is a sacred, golden mountain called Mount Sumeru (or Mount Meru) that passes through the Earth's center and is so high that it reaches heaven. It is the highest mountain, the center of the Buddhist universe and the abode of supreme Hindu gods and deities such as Indra, Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, and the Devas.

Sanam Luang, the royal main ground to the north of the Grand Palace once called Thung Phra Meru or the royal cremation ground, has now been transformed from a leisure park into a royal crematorium ground in preparation for the deceased King's return to Mount Sumeru, or heaven, as a god.

IMAGE: THE GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPT./WWW.KINGRAMA9.NET

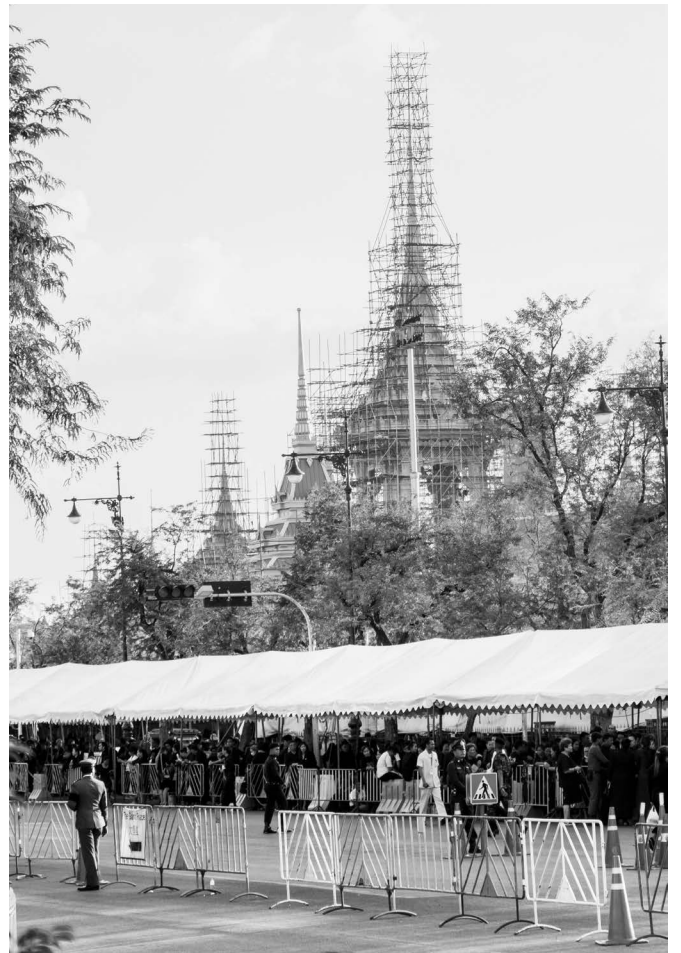


If you are visiting Sanam Luang this month, you'll be likely amazed by the exquisite Thai architecture and high Buddhist art on display there. The royal crematorium complex replicates the concept of Buddhist cosmology as detailed in *Traibhumikatha*. The main Busabok, a square tent-like structure with a multi-tiered roof topped with a golden spire, symbolizes Indra's mansion atop Mount Sumeru.

The iconic elements of the mystical universe permeate the crematorium hall design. The handcrafted lotus basins and mythical animals, for example, represent those creatures that dwell in the legendary Himmapan (aka Himavanta) forest at the foothills of Mount Sumeru. The arch-shaped decorations on the roof symbolize the aura of the Buddha, and the descending roofline represents Mount Sattaboripan, the seven mountains that surround Mount Sumeru.

The body of King Bhumibol has been lying in state for people to pay their last respects at the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall in the Grand Palace compound until September 30, 2017. Then, the royal cremation ceremony will take place from October 25 to 29.

In brief, there are six royal processions for the pre-and post-cremation ceremonies. These processions represent the rituals marking the return of a deity to heaven. On October 26, at 7 a.m., the body of the late King will be transported from Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall to the Royal Crematorium at Sanam Luang by a royal chariot as part of the funeral procession. At 5:30 p.m. the ceremonial first lighting of the funeral pyre begins.



PHOTOGRAPH: NAAM SOMBATANTAKORN



PHOTOGRAPHS: TEERAT YAEMNGAMLUK







PHOTOGRAPHS: TEERAT YAEMNGAMLUEA

October 27 is the day of the removal of the royal ashes and relics from the crematorium and transfer of the royal ashes and relics to the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall in a royal procession.

On October 28 a final service will be held before the transfer of the royal relics to the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall.

The ceremony will be broadcast live on every national TV channel. After the cremation ceremony, a month-long exhibition about the life and times of King Bhumibol and his royal projects will be held from November 1 to 30 at the crematorium complex.

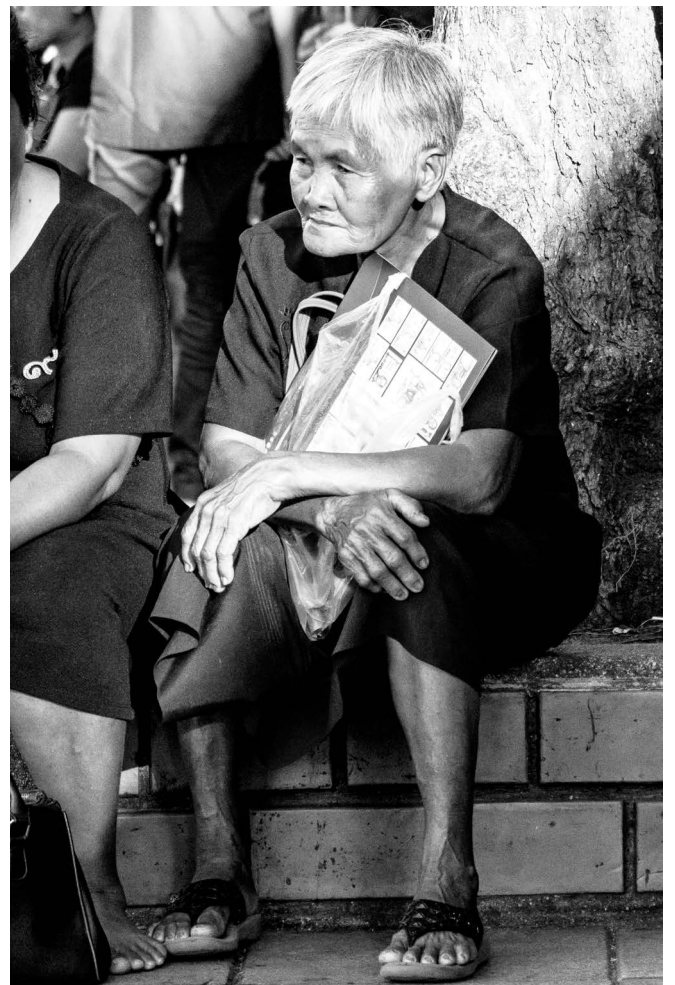
I'd like to encourage everyone to witness the upcoming royal cremation ceremony of King Bhumibol. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn more about Thailand, its royal history and heritage as well as the Thais' love for the monarchy. It's also the day to pay our last respects to one of the greatest monarchs the world has ever known.

PHOTOGRAPH: NAAM SOMBATANANTAKORN



PHOTOGRAPH: TEERAT YAEMNGAMLUEA





PHOTOGRAPHS: TEERAT YAEMNGAMLUUEA

PHOTOGRAPH: TEERAT YAEMNGAMLUEA



# Memories of My Father

BY PLOYLADA SIRACHADAPONG

**H**is Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej who was looked up to as a father figure for Thais and “father of the land” throughout his seven-decade reign, is widely remembered for, among other things, his genuine love for art and architecture. This was clearly evident in his royal projects.

One of the most memorable projects was the building of the *Royal Barge Narai Song Suban HM Rama IX*. This and other royal barges form part of the Royal Barge Procession Ceremony that is held to celebrate special state and royal occasions. This ceremony will always have a special place in my heart since it is this memory that my father and I share together.

When my family first moved to Bangkok many years ago, my father took me on a day trip to the National Museum of Royal Barges where the *Royal Barge Narai Song Suban HM Rama IX* was on display. He told me the stories behind this particular royal barge and the Royal Barge Procession. The latter is a ceremony that I should try to witness as it is going to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me.

The ceremony – a wonderful visual spectacle that has been held for nearly 700 years only on important occasions – involves a procession of stunningly decorated royal barges making their way along the Chao Phraya river (aka the River of Kings). The procession gleaming with both religious and royal significance moves slowly from the Wasukri Royal Landing Place in the Dusit area past the Grand Palace on its way to the famous Temple of Dawn or Wat Arun.

Inspired by the mythical Hindu god Narayana, the name Narai Song Suban means Narayana, an epithet for Vishnu, riding on his vehicle Garuda (a large bird-like creature in Hindu mythology). The fascinating name and myth inspired me to do more research into this exotic royal barge.

This barge was originally built during the reign of King Nangklao (Rama III). During World War II, a bomb explosion badly damaged the barge, with only its prow, or the front end of the barge, remaining intact. Almost five decades later, the Royal Thai Navy in collaboration with the Fine Arts Department and the Bureau of the Royal Household embarked on a mission to rebuild the royal barge to celebrate the 50th anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s accession to the throne in 1996, restoring the battered *Narai Song Suban* to its former glory.

The project began with the reconstruction of the keel in 1994, combining modern technology with traditional techniques from the early Rattanakosin (Bangkok) era. The barge – measuring 44.30 meters long by 3.20 meters wide in size – can carry 50 oarsmen, two steersmen, two officers fore and aft, a signalman, seven royal umbrella bearers and a chanter.

Its figurehead is a teak carving of a red Garuda holding Nagas in both hands with the dark blue Narayana, also carved from teak wood, riding on its back. Narayana is a Hindu god described in the Vedas as having four arms and holding a mace, a discus, a conch and a lotus. The final touches of the prow include magnificent clear-glass mirror and gilded lacquer decorations.

The red hull is adorned with highly elaborate Thai motifs designed by Nikom Ponyium, an artisan from the Fine Arts Department. Well aware of the King’s expectation of the barge’s new design, not the old one, the artisan came up with the patterns comprised of authentic Thai flowers in vogue during the Third Reign and a combination of Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin-style motifs to give the barge’s design a unique, contemporary character. In the middle of the barge is a pavilion called Ratcha Banlang Kanya that houses a throne for the King and that ensconces members of his royal family. The interior of the pavilion features Garuda-themed patterns with the roof and drapery fabricated with gold-tone decorations.

The *Royal Barge Narai Song Suban HM Rama IX* was completed and launched on April 5, 1996. On May 6, 1996, it was used as the main royal barge during the Royal Barge Procession Ceremony to celebrate the King’s Golden Jubilee on the throne. On this special occasion, it took over the role of the main royal barge from the *Royal Barge Suphannahong* (which means “golden swan”) normally used as the main royal barge reserved for the monarch.

The royal barges are on display at the Royal Barges National Museum. It’s well worth a visit to experience the beauty of authentic Thai art. For me, this royal barge not only represents our national heritage, but it also shows King Bhumibol’s love of fine arts. It also reminds us that the King has never really left us as his greatest legacy lives on through all his royal projects and all the wonderful stories and memories we have of him that we will pass down to the next generation.

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## The National Museum of Royal Barges

80/1, Arun Amarin Road, Bangkok Noi

Opening hours: From Monday to Sunday,

9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Tel. 02 424 0004

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PHOTOGRAPHS: TEERAT YAEMNGAMLUEA



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