

King Bhumibol Adulyadej: Thailand's International Monarch

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the “Father of the Nation” to the people of Thailand who passed away on 13 October 2016, led a remarkable life filled with valuable achievements. His Majesty's passing left an indelible influence not only on His people but also on the international community.

His Majesty was born in the United States in Cambridge, Massachusetts- being the only monarch born on US soil. Spending His formative years in Europe, mainly in Switzerland, His Majesty studied science and then politics before acceding to the throne in 1946. Despite growing up in the West, His Majesty was instilled by the Princess Mother, HRH Princess Srinakarindra, with the values and traditions of the Thai people. Thus, His Majesty's background was a unique convergence of Western and Eastern cultures. This was reflected in His Majesty having a wider range of interests than other Thais of His generation, ranging from the arts such as music, photography and painting, sports such as sailing- to scientific inventions and innovations. His Majesty King Bhumibol was a true “Renaissance Monarch” in every aspect.

His Majesty's grandfather, King Chulalongkorn the Great, also known as King Rama V, had guided Thailand into the modern era. The King enabled Thailand (or Siam as it was then known) to be the only country in Southeast Asia to not be struck by the wave of colonization. King Rama V achieved this by learning tactics from the West and by travelling to Europe in 1897 in order to make Siam known to the Western monarchs – to showcase them that Siam was a civilized nation and not a land of 'barbarians'.

Early in His Reign, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej followed in the footsteps of His illustrious forebear. In less than a decade, from 1959 to 1967, His Majesty, accompanied by Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, visited 27 countries. He met with important leaders of the world, reaffirmed ties forged in Europe during the time of Rama V, addressed the US Congress, and placed a small country like Thailand firmly on the international map. Apart from merely “showing the flag”, the trips were also opportunities for His Majesty to learn the best skills and practices from developed Western nations, which He would later utilize to the benefit of the Thai people.

After that period of international travel, His Majesty returned to Thailand and never travelled abroad again. When asked why, His Majesty responded that He wanted to understand Thailand better in order to help the Thai people. For the remainder of His Reign, His Majesty travelled to all the remote corners of Thailand, no matter how underdeveloped or difficult to reach, visited all of Thailand's provinces, and met with local residents from all walks of life – farmers, fishermen, merchants, local administrators – to listen to their views and needs. His Majesty provided technical advice to government agencies in forming solutions to help the common people, bringing about a synergy between local traditions and modern methods. During all of His domestic travels, His Majesty was invariably accompanied by Her Majesty Queen Sirikit and other Members of the Royal Family. From a young age, Members of the Thai Royal Family were instilled with Thai culture and values, including the responsibilities to the Thai people. For this reason, They continue to work until this day to help support and improve the lives of Their subjects.

His Majesty consistently maintained that Thailand is inherently an agricultural country and should never abandon its roots- repeatedly emphasising that Thailand must be able to feed itself. His Majesty therefore attached a great deal of importance in helping agriculture flourish. He applied His knowledge in sciences, mainly acquired from His previous trips abroad, to create and support over 4,000 Royal Development Projects. The Projects focused on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of farming methods, using modern techniques such as crop substitution, water management, reversing the effects of soil erosion, along with inventions and innovations such as artificial rainmaking, the Chaipattana Aerator and generating renewable energy from palm oil- many of which received patents domestically and abroad. Ultimately, this resulted in a significant improvement in the livelihood and welfare of the majority of Thailand's farmers.

In this holistic approach to sustainable development, His Majesty was a visionary far beyond His time. Almost every priority that the world now focuses on in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), His Majesty had been advocating for and practicing for many decades. His Majesty first outlined the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) in 1974, an approach that encourages people to live within their means and not abuse natural resources in order to increase sustainability and create resilience to external challenges. Its core principles, giving importance to living a life of moderation and applying discipline and self-control, are at the heart of sustainable development- a cause that the world now views as a priority agenda. Over the course of more than 40 years, His Majesty's philosophy continues to be ingrained in the minds of the Thai people, particularly following the hard lessons learned from the 1997 economic crisis. Currently Thailand continues to openly share its positive experiences and promote the philosophy with the international community.

The significance that His Majesty attached to agriculture has evolved Thailand into one of the world's leading agricultural powerhouses today. Now Thailand is not only able to feed itself; it also contributes immensely to the maintenance of global food security. Today, many of His Majesty's inventions and innovations, such as artificial rainmaking, are increasingly being applied abroad. Such remarkable achievements that have created a positive impact on a local and global scale have earned His Majesty the recognition and accolade of "Thailand's Development King" by the United Nations and the international community. This is a title well-deserved for His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej in light of the incredible legacy He has left behind.

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