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FROM THE MAGAZINE

Sunday, Nov. 05, 2006

## King Bhumibol Adulyadej

Over 60 years, a beloved monarch has used his moral authority to guide Thailand through many crises

BY ROBERT HORN

As a single shot shattered the stillness of Bangkok's Borompimarn Palace on a steamy June morning in 1946, the land some still called Siam changed forever. Twenty-year-old King Ananda was dead. The manner of his passing—by accident, suicide or murder—endures as Thailand's deepest mystery. The pistol smoke barely had time to clear before the mantle of kingship passed to Ananda's 18-year-old brother, Bhumibol Adulyadej. Some, including a new magazine in Asia named TIME, pondered whether the "gangling, spectacled" teenager could survive the deadly intrigues of a fabled and faraway Oriental land.

The odds were against him. All across Southeast Asia, monarchies were being extinguished—kings and princes stripped of power, driven into exile or executed. Yet young Bhumibol steadily grew in stature, not least by launching over 3,000 royal projects to help the poor. Even as a communist insurgency raged, he personally delivered relief to remote villages. Bhumibol also quietly counseled and sometimes openly cajoled governments, always urging them to put public interest first. Having sat on the throne for 60 years, he is the world's longest-reigning monarch. His stewardship has been so masterful that in times of crisis Thais invariably turn to one man: King Bhumibol. Indeed, on two occasions—October 1973 and May 1992—with Thailand descending into chaos, the King, armed only with his moral authority, intervened to end bloodshed.

Today, a group of generals has again seized power. They have pledged to give Thailand a fairer and lasting democratic system. Once more, Thailand's people will look to King Bhumibol, trusting him to ensure that the generals keep their promise.

[From TIME asia Magazine, issue dated November 13, 2006 Vol. 168, No. 20](#)

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