

As Thailand's royal interregnum approaches, Crown Prince is apparently clearing out his enemies

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Opponents of Thai Crown Prince Throw in the Royal Towel

Elites surrounding the palace may be horrified by the prince's behavior, but they have little recourse.

The opposition to Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn among Thailand's elites, who campaigned for years to prevent him from becoming king upon his father's death, has apparently capitulated and they are mainly now seeking to minimize damage, according to a source outside Thailand with links to well-informed parties in Bangkok.

The signal was given when Prem Tinsulanonda, the elderly head of the Privy Council, which advises the monarchy, showed up to see off the 63-year-old prince, looking remarkably fit in blue cycling lycra — the queen's royal color — helmet and sunglasses, to lead thousands of Bangkok residents on a 43-km "Bike for Mom" rally in August.

Prem's appearance at the start of the proceedings was regarded as a public indication that his attempts, and those of other members of the Privy Council, to seek an alternative to the prince were over.

"As long as National Council for Peace and Order – the junta – sticks with [the prince], no one can do anything," the source said. To rumors that Prem was actually backing Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, the prince's sister, the source said: "Sure, he did. But he's had to line up with all the others. He was right there in the receiving line for Bike for Mom. That was a signal that the resistance was over."

Over the past weeks, a massive purge to cement the prince's position has gone on in Bangkok, said to have been orchestrated by the enraged future monarch. The "reign of terror," as some call it, is said to be related to the interregnum as the ailing 87-year old King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and his wife, who in public appearances has seemed comatose, linger while their power seeps away. A second bike rally, set for December, is slated to honor the king.

"These are dark, evil days in my country," one businessman told *Asia Sentinel*. "I fear for my country."

"The Prince is now trying to signal to the public that the royal transition has already begun," said Pavin Chachavalpongpun, a former Thai diplomat who is now in exile overseas and wanted for lese-majeste. "In this process, he seems have been able to strike a deal with with the military government. His attempt to forge an alliance with the military also came with a series of purges against a large number of individuals, military men and police officers who got themselves entangled in scandals concerning initiatives launched by the Crown Prince. The latest mysterious deaths have served as nothing but to further damage his reputation. Ironically it goes against his attempt to reinvent his new image at this critical point in the transitional process."

The royal dog and a naked princess

Whatever the nature and extent of the purge, which has apparently taken the lives of at least four officials, caused several to flee the country and others to disappear, the Crown Prince has long been known in Thailand – and by people well outside royal circles – as frighteningly erratic. The use of the draconian lese majeste law – article 112 of the Penal Code – against a wide range of critics and others, seems aimed vainly at stopping discussion of the prince's antics, including womanizing. He is now on his fourth wife.

Cables from the US Embassy in Bangkok released by Wikileaks several years ago, for instance, indicated that Prem and his allies did not view the prince as a suitable successor to the King, the world's longest serving monarch. One cable described the Crown Prince's naming his dog Foo Foo a marshal in the Royal Thai Air Force and allowing the dog to graze on food atop tables at an official banquet. A leaked video of a birthday for Foo Foo, complete with a naked Princess Srirasmi, his now-discarded wife, has circulated widely in Thailand.

"What concentrates the concerns of Thai elites who have so long been loyal to King Bhumibol is that the Crown Prince could mismanage the monarchy and its relationship with the Thai people so badly that it could set off a series of events that lead to a Nepal type scenario," in which the Nepalese drove the royalty from power, a source told *Asia Sentinel*. "The fate of the monarchy in Nepal was that first it consumed itself within and then was ultimately tossed out by the people. That is the great fear of the monarchy in Thailand."

That may already be happening. One western businessman who has spent decades in Thailand said that in Bangkok, the rumors of the prince's antics and the long, slow decline of the king, has meant that veneration has been seeping away.

Who's scamming who?

The question is whether an alleged "scam" involving the use of his name to raise money by some close to him that enraged the prince was done without his knowledge. It involved huge amounts of money spent on publicity and the sale of memorabilia from the bicycle rides. But several sources have told *Asia Sentinel* the purge was driven by the prince's anger over the fact that others, including Mor Yong, his soothsayer, were reaping publicity that he thought was his alone. The luckless offenders all had their heads shaved, a humiliation that goes back to several generations of previous Thai kings.

"It's quite clear that this purge has been driven from the highest level in what was apparently an effort to ensure that credit for the Bike for Mom and Bike for Dad efforts accrues to only one person, and one person only," a source said. "Previously, ambitious persons with an appetite for risk might enter the Crown Prince's service thinking that they were getting on the fast elevator to the top – but if the reward is ultimately getting tossed off the top, who is going to sign up for that?"

Among those purged were Major General Phisitsak Seniwong Na Ayutthaya, the prince's main bodyguard, who died in mid-October, allegedly by hanging himself with his shirt in a jail cell after he had been arrested under the lese-majeste law. Others include Police Major Prakrom Warunprapa, who is also said to have hanged himself in jail. Still others have fled overseas to escape the prince's wrath. A police spokesman sent to intercede with the prince in Germany, where he spends much of his time, has disappeared and resigned by letter.

The latest is Suriyan Sucharitpolwong, Mor Yong himself, who was also charged with lese majeste and is said to have died over the weekend in a prison cell of blood poisoning.

Sources in Bangkok say both police officials were beaten and tortured. Instead of releasing the bodies to their families, as is the case for most Buddhist deaths to give time for making merit and preparing the bodies for the afterlife, the two were rushed to crematoriums and immediately burned. The gossip in Bangkok is that officials wanted to hide the evidence of torture.

Our Correspondent

* *Asia Sentinel*. Posted on November 11, 2015:

<http://www.asiasentinel.com/politics/opponents-of-thai-crown-prince-throw-in-the-royal-towel/>

Thailand's Crown Prince Starts Another Purge

'Reign of terror,' frightened aristocrats say.

As Thailand's royal interregnum approaches, the country's ruling class has been seized by what amounts almost to a reign of terror, with Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn apparently clearing out his enemies in a fashion that goes back to the installation of a long line of Rama kings.

The tension is so serious in Bangkok that many people are frightened to speak on the telephone or identify themselves in any way that could subject them to the purge. Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, the former head of the military who named himself premier after the May 2014 coup that ended parliamentary democracy, appears to have accepted Vajiralongkorn as the next king and is seeking to manage the situation the best way he can.

Still unpopular

The 87-year-old King Bhumibol Adulyadej, known as Rama IX and the ninth monarch of the Chakri Dynasty, has been fading for half a decade, spending months at a time in the hospital as the succession drama plays out behind the scenes, with what is said to be vicious infighting between the backers of the 63-year-old crown prince and his sister, Maha Chakri Sirindhorn although the Thai succession does not allow for a female to become the monarch.

But Vajiralongkorn is so thoroughly detested in royal circles that efforts have been vainly made to sideline him for his associations with Chinese gangsters, his womanizing and his refusal to adhere to royal rules. But a source said, "There is no longer any doubt that the prince will become the king."

'Bike for Dad'

A four-times-married wastrel who most recently pitched out his long-time consort for a Thai Airways flight attendant, the prince spends most of his time in Germany although he has made recent periodic trips back to Thailand to seek to rehabilitate his image, most principally through a series of bicycle rides in honor of his ailing parents. However, a source in Bangkok said, the prince has become enraged over allegations that people in his entourage have apparently been profiting from the sale of “Bike for Mom” and “Bike for Dad” souvenir and promotional items.

The country’s draconian lese majeste law has been used against several alleged offenders including Suriyan Sucharitpolwong, better known as Mor Yong, the prince’s soothsayer, allegedly because he went to spirits tycoon Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi, Thailand’s second-richest man, to ask for funds for the Bike for Dad event. Charoen is said to have complained to Princess Sirindhorn, who told her brother in Germany. That has blown up into a major incident with the arrest of the fortune teller and others. Dozens of army and police officials are believed to be under fire.

“The Crown Prince is said to be trying to whitewash his image ahead of the succession,” a well-placed source told Asia Sentinel, an assessment shared with several other sources. “He is also said to be outraged that most of the people who have helped run his networks over recent decades have been skimming money from them too. I have no idea why the prince would be so angry about this, because it’s standard for everybody to take their cut. But anyway, the prince is sending a message to everybody — don’t fuck with me ahead of the succession.”

Last November, the prince suddenly ordered a purge of all relatives or associates of former Princess Srirasmi, the cocktail hostess he had taken as his wife in 2001. She was banished off into the country, Along with her went Pongpat Chayaphan, her uncle and the head of the Central Investigation Unit, and dozens of police. Srirasmi’s parents were jailed along with her three brothers, who were also charged with defaming the monarchy.

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* *Asia Sentinel*. Posted on November 5, 2015:

<http://www.asiasentinel.com/society/thailand-crown-prince-maha-vajiralongkorn-purge/>
