

Content

Meaning -----	1
Background -----	1
Important royal activities -----	3
War with Burma -----	8
Relations with Vietnam -----	16
Cultural activities on Chakri Day -----	17

Chakri Memorial Day

Meaning

Chakri Day refers to the occasion on which the Chakri dynasty is remembered. It is the day on which King Buddha Yodfa the Great (Rama I) ascended to the throne of Siam.



Background

In 1919, King Rama VI granted Royal Permission for all Thai citizens to express their gratitude to every king of the Chakri dynasty. To commemorate the event, the king set April 6 of every year as the date for Thai citizens to pay homage to the late kings.

The King's early life

King Buddha Yodfa the Great was born on March 20, 1732, with the name of Thong Duang (during the reign of King Boromakot). Thong Duang joined the royal service during the reign of King Utumporn and

was soon ennobled as Luang Yokkrabut (deputy governor) of Ratchaburi, while his friend Sin, later King Taksin, was appointed as Luang Yokkrabut of Tak. When King Taksin, then Phraya Tak, assembled his force in Rayong, Thong Duang sent his younger brother, Nai Sudchinda, whose real name was Boonma to bring Taksin's mother, who had fled the Burmese to Petchaburi, to join her son. King Taksin was so pleased with Boonma that he promoted him to be Phra Mahamontri. Boonma later invited his brother to join King Taksin. King Taksin later raised Thong Duang to the following positions: Phra Rajwarin, Phraya Abhai Ronatit, Phraya Yommarat, Chao Phraya Chakri and finally Somdech Chao Phraya Mahakasatsuek (The Mighty Warrior of the King). Then King Taksin became mentally unbalanced, and this caused hardship to the royal officers and the citizens at large, which in turn resulted in a revolt against him. Consequently, Somdech Chao Phraya Mahakasatsuek, who was on a mission to suppress Cambodia, had to make a hasty return to quell the revolt. With the unanimous counsel of the principal officials, Taksin was put to death, and they humbly offered the crown to Somdech Chao Phraya Mahakasatsuek, who thereupon ascended to the throne on April 6, 1782 and became the founder and first king of the present Chakri dynasty, with the royal name jointly given by the Supreme Patriarchs of the two Buddhist sects, namely Kamavasi (a town-monk) and Aranyavasi (a forest-dwelling monk):

*“Phrabatsomdechpraboromarajathirajramathibodi Srisintorn
Boromma-hachakrapaddhi Rajathibodhin Tharanintrathiraj
Rattanaphasakornvongong-paramathibet Tripuvanesuanvoranartnayok
Diloknoppharattanaraj Jatiajavasrai Samutyutaromolsakolachakravarathiben
Suriyentrathibodhin Harintrathadathibodi Srisuviboonkuna-akanit
Rithiramesuandhammi-karajathiraj Dechochaipromatepaditep Tripuvanathibet
Lokachetvisuthmakut Pratesakata Mahabuddhangkoon Boromanartboromaboripitra
Phrabuddhachao-U-hua.”*

Having been conferred with this long name and without a short name, the people simply called him “Phaen Din Ton” or “The Early period of the king’s reign and Phaen Din Ni” or “In the reign”. To avoid being called “The last reign in the dynasty” or “Phaen Din Plai”, King Rama III later conferred King Rama I the posthumous royal name of Phra Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke.

Important royal activities

Soon after ascending the throne, King Rama I raised his brother Chao Phya Surasith, to the exalted position of the Maha Uparat (Deputy King) and promoted his nephew, Phya Suriya-Abhai to be the Prince of the Rear



Palace (Deputy Maha Uparat), King Rama I set himself the following tasks:

1. The Construction of the New Capital

The new king immediately moved the capital from Thon Buri to the opposite bank of the Chao Phya River, to the site now known as Bangkok.

The reasons for this move were as follows:

- The area of Thon Buri stretched to the eastern bank of the Chao Phya River close to the present capital. With the river flowing through its centre, the capital was difficult to defend in case of a direct, such as had occurred at Phitsanulok where he had learned through bitter experience of fighting with the Burmese. Above all, due to the river's vastness and its deep and strong current, a greater difficulty was that a bridge could not be built, and it was inconvenient to cross the river by boat. When the enemy laid siege to the capital, it thus became difficult to dispatch troops to reinforce the other side of the river.
- If the capital was completely moved to the eastern side, the Chao Phya River could be used as the best defence since at this point there

was a wide bend enclosing a large area of land that could be easily defended by digging canals on the remaining sides.

- The palace in Thon Buri (the present location of the Naval Cadet School) which stood at the bend of the river was subject to constant erosion. Thus, it was not a suitable place to build a permanent palace.
- The capital was hemmed in between two temples, Wat Arunrajvararam and Wat Tai Talad. It was not possible to make future expansion as demolition of the temple, to make way for palace construction, was considered inappropriate by all Buddhists.

The construction of Bangkok indicated that the king had a strong determination not to move the capital to Ayutthaya again. The king ordered a lot of bricks to be brought down from the old walls of Ayutthaya to be used in the building of the new capital.

The construction took seven years to complete. After completion, the site was given the official name:

“Krungthep Mahanakorn Amorn Ratanakosindra Mahindrayuddhya Mahadilokpop Noparatana Rajdhani Burirom Udom Rajnivet Mahastan”.

The new capital was completed and celebrated at the beginning of 1785.

The important structures in the new capital included:

The Emerald Buddha Temple which was built within the compound of the Grand Palace to house the sacred image of the Emerald Buddha which has been considered as the talisman of the Thai kingdom. The temple itself has no living quarters for monks and is only used by the king on certain ceremonial occasions. Wang Na (The Front Palace), formerly the palace of Kromphrarajwangbowornsatanmongkon (The Maha Uparat or Deputy King), was built on the present sites of Thammasat University, the National Museum and part of the front of the Emerald Buddha Temple.

The site for the Grand Palace occupied the former area of the Chinese community whose leader, Phraya Rajasethi, was a rich merchant. The community had been moved to the district of what is now Sampeng (The name Sampeng derives from Sam Plaeng (or the three pieces of land), which in Chinese pronunciation was distorted to Sampeng.

2. Laying down the administrative rules

The king adopted the old administrative system of Ayutthaya, but strengthened it by appointing two Principal Officers (Akaramahasenabodi), the Samukalahom was in charge of military affairs

and the Samuhanayok in charge of civilian affairs was divided into 4 Great Offices: Wieng (Local Government), Wang (the Royal Household), Klang (finance) and Na (agriculture). The provincial administration was also rearranged, with the northern provinces coming under the control of the Samuhanayok, the southern provinces under the control of the Samukalahom and the eastern coastal and the sea-ports provinces under the control of the Harbour Department. The reason for this division was said to be due to the fact that during the final period of Ayutthaya, a certain Samukalahom committed a mistake, resulting in his provinces being confiscated.

3. The Revision of Laws

In 1804, the king realised that though the Thai Kingdom had its own legal texts which had been used for trying court cases since ancient times, most of these texts had been lost during the fall of Ayutthaya, the remaining texts had been distorted to serve the interests of individuals. A commission of legal experts was therefore set up to revise the laws. Upon being completed, three seals, the Lion, the Elephantine Tiger and the Glass Lotus Flower were affixed to the code and three copies were kept in separate locations. In this way, the new code of law was known as the

“Law of the Three Seals” and was used up to the early period of King Rama V.

4. The Revival of Royal Ceremonies

Realising the significance of Thai ancient tradition, King Rama I ordered the revival of several royal ceremonies such as The Coronation Day, the Royal Ploughing Ceremony and the Ceremony to Take an Oath of Allegiance.

War with Burma

During Rama I’s reign, Siam was engaged in several wars with Burma. The most significant war decided the fate of the Thai kingdom, which has remained independent since then. The events surrounding this war will be narrated in detail.

The first war took place when the building of the new capital had been completed for three years. In 1785, Burma launched a major offensive against Siam. It was due to the internal unrest in Burma that Siam was able to devote much of its time to the building of the new capital, without interference, for three years. Eventually, King Bodawpaya (Padung)

seized the throne of Burma and transferred his capital to Amarapura. The new king had the high ambition of making a clean sweep of Siam in order to extend his dominion to a size similar to that of other Burmese kings. Padung ordered a mass mobilisation, in his own capital and in his colonial states, of 144,000 men. He divided them into nine armies and launched an invasion of Siam; five armies were to attack Bangkok, two were to attack the North and the remaining two were to attack the South.

The nine Burmese armies crossed the Siamese boundaries at five different points :

- At Chumporn, to attack the southern provinces
- Through the Bongtee Pass against Ratchaburi and Phetchaburi
- Through the Three Padoda's Pass in Kanchanaburi, with Padung
- Himself in command, to attack Bangkok
- Through the Melamao Pass against Tak
- And from Chiang Saen, to capture Phitsanuloke, Sukhothai and
- Lampang in the North.

After being informed of the massive Burmese invasion, King Rama I mobilised 70,000 troops, only half the number of the Burmese. The King then called for consultation with his Principal Commanders, whose

unanimous decision was to resist only the major army led by King Padung. Three armies were dispatched to counter the Burmese invaders; one under the command of the King's brother, Kromphrarajvangboworn, or the Deputy King, with 30,000 troops moved toward Kanchanaburi, the second army under Chao Phraya Dharma and Chao Phraya Yommarat, with 50,000 troops marched toward Ratchaburi, and the third army under Kromluang-anuraktevet (The Deputy King of the Back Palace), with 25,000 troops, started toward Nakorn Sawan. Meanwhile, the remaining troops, led by the King himself, were to be stationed in Bangkok so as to reinforce the advancing troops. This was the greatest war in the history of Thailand. Two major mistakes were made by the Burmese armies:

- The Burmese troops crossed the Thai frontier at different points, making it easy for the Thai troops to launch a counter attack.
- The Burmese army was too large and only wanted to conquer Siam Without proper logistics, they suffered food shortage and suffered from low morale.

1. The fighting at Lardya in 1785

The fighting took place at Lardya of Kanchanaburi, where the Thai troops intended to force the Burmese army to set up their camp in the

mountains. These mountains were bare of food. Thus, even a small Thai army could win the battle. Without food the Burmese invaders were forced to transport rations from Burma and were subject to frequent attacks by the Thai guerrillas. Moreover, Thai troops concealed their real number by sneaking out of their camp at night and marching in the morning. The Burmese troops became frightened when they thought the Thai side was mobilising frequent reinforcements. At the same time, Thai troops fired at the enemy with ammunition made from wood. This led the Burmese to think that as long as there was a forest, the Thai side would never run out of ammunition. Realising the enemy's weakness, the Deputy King ordered a direct assault on the Burmese camp on 17 February, 1785, and forced King Padung to withdraw his troops.

After his victory at Lardya, the Deputy King then moved southwards toward Ratchaburi, where he found the Burmese at Khao Ngoo and Lamphachee. He at once attacked and defeated them.

The Burmese army from Chiangsaen, after capturing Chiang Mai, went straight to Lampang, Sawankhalok, and Sukhothai. Another Burmese division advanced to Tak and came on to Rahaeng where they were defeated by the Thai troops stationed there. The Thai then followed up

Burmese who were besieging the town. The Burmese were defeated and retreated to Chiang Mai.

Meanwhile, the Burmese division that had been ordered to attack the South went by sea and took Takua-Pa and Takua-Tung. They then proceeded to Thalang while another army went by land and took Krabi, Ranong and Chumporn before advancing to Nakorn Srithammarat. At Nakorn Srithammarat they spread the news of their victory of Bangkok. When the Governor of Nakorn Srithammarat heard this, he became frightened and escaped. In this way, the Burmese easily took the town. They were about to go on to Pattalung and Songkhla, but were halted by a group of local residents led by a Buddhist monk named Phra Maha Boonchuey. Fortunately, the Deputy King arrived at Chaiya and forced the Burmese to withdraw in desperation.

The Deputy King then moved on to Nakorn Srithammarat and proceeded to Pattani where he captured a siege gun. Learning of the Siamese victory over Pattani, the cities of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu immediately submitted to Siam and became her vassal states.

At that time, Kedah (Saiburi) was governed by the Sultan who later leased the island of Penang to the East India Company at a nominal sum

in the hope of getting British support. Since then, Kedah has never been governed by a Sultan.

Meanwhile, Burmese naval forces took Takua-Pa, and Takua-Tung, and then proceeded to Thalang (the island of Phuket), the Governor of which had just died. In his place, his widow, Lady Muk, and her sister, Lady Chan, led, the army against the Burmese. The Burmese laid siege to the town for over a month. Due to a lack of food, the Burmese had to retreat. As a reward for their excellent services, King Rama I conferred a noble title on both Chan and Muk. Chan was now Tao (Lady) Tepsatri, and Muk was Tao Srisuntorn.

2. War at Ta Dindaeng and Samsop in 1786

After his defeat at Lardya, King Padung was ashamed, but never gave up his hope to conquer Siam. Again he dispatched an army, this time led by Phra Maha Uparat, by way of Martaban, to camp down at Ta Dindaeng and Samsop in Kanchanaburi. The Burmese had established themselves strongly and were ready to launch a major invasion.

King Rama I sent his brother, the Deputy King to Saiyoke and told him to wait for his arrival there. The Deputy King was ordered to attack the

Burmese at Samsop, while the King led his troops to attack the Burmese at Ta Dindaeng. After a three-day fight, the Burmese were defeated and were driven back in great confusion. The Phra Maha Uparat himself was able to make a narrow escape. The Thai side seized elephants, horses and a large quantity of weapons.

Apart from these two major wars, there were five other ones:

1. In 1787 King Padung took Chiang Tung and Chiang Rung, and proceeded to Lanna. The Burmese laid siege to the towns of Lampang and Pasang. The Deputy King led the Thai army to defeat the Burmese, and, on his return to Bangkok, he brought with him an ancient bronze Buddha image, “Phra Buddha Sihing”.
2. In the same year, the Siamese took the offensive and attacked Tavoy. But they failed to take it as they were inexperienced with the route and faced a shortage of food. So, they were forced to withdraw. Even then, the Burmese were afraid to follow.
3. In 1795, King Rama I undertook another invasion of Burma (Tavoy). This did not meet with much success, due

to similar problems that had plagued the 1787 Thai offensive, and Tavoy was recaptured by the Burmese.

4. In 1797, King Padung made another attack on Chiang Mai but was driven back by the Deputy King.

5. In 1802, the Burmese made another major offensive against Siam. They came with 7 armies in the hope of capturing Lanna. The Deputy King again led his troops to fight the invaders, but fell ill. He ordered his commanders to go ahead. At that time, by the King's order, the Prince of the Rear Palace (Kromphrarajvanglang) came to assist the Thai troops. The Burmese were driven back out of the Thai territory. Lanna, which was comprised of 57 provincial towns, came under the complete control of Siam. The Governor of Chiang Mai, Prince Kawila, was later promoted to be Phra Boromrajathibodisrisuriyawong or, in short "Chao Khanthasima" The Deputy King died on his return to Bangkok in 1803.

Relations with Vietnam

During the final phase of the Thon Buri period and at the beginning of Bangkok's period, the rebellion called "Tayson" broke out in Vietnam. The rebels took Saigon and drove out all members of the Vietnamese royal family. A Vietnamese Prince, Nguyen Anh or "Ong Chiengsue" fled to Bangkok in 1785, where he sought protection and assistance from Rama I. The Thai king immediately gave him full assistance. However, because of troubles with the Burmese, Rama I could only offer him limited support. Nguyen Anh fled the country and got help from the French Bishop who, with the help of his French compatriots, was able to crush the Tayson rebellion. Nguyen Anh was at last crowned Emperor Gailong and subsequently sent tributes to Rama I. Rama I provided the Vietnamese emperor support from time to time by supplying ammunition and boats with which rebellions were suppressed.

Cultural activities on Chakri Day

1. To hold a seminar for the public better understands of the royal activities and the significance of this day.



2. To hold an exhibition about the King's life.

3. To perform a wreath-laying ceremony e.g. to lay a wreath at the King Rama I or at a designated place.



4. Other activities include:

- To raise national flags at government offices and living quarters,

- To make merit dedicated to the late Kings,

- To hold other performances in honour of the King.

5. Any other suitable activities.

