

## King in waiting

HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn has been preparing for his next role of King of Thailand all his life, unlike his father, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who was born just two years after his uncle, King Prajadhipok, Rama VII, acceded to the throne. Had King Prajadhipok had children, or remained on the throne for a long time, things might have been different.

Political changes led to the king's abdication in 1935, followed by the tragic and premature death of his successor, King Ananda Mahidol, in 1946. So it was HRH Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej found himself acceding to the throne through a series of unexpected circumstances.

HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, on the other hand, is the only son of Their Majesties the King and Queen, and was conferred the title of crown prince at the age of 20, confirming his status as heir apparent.

The Prince was born on July 28, 1952, at Ambara Villa, Dusit Palace. He received his early education at Chitralada School, followed by Millfield School in Somerset, Britain, and The King's School in Sydney, Australia. His formal education was followed by military training at the Royal Military College, Duntroon in Canberra, Australia. His military background was enhanced with training programmes in special forces demolition, unconventional warfare tactics and advanced navigation training in the US, Britain and Australia, and he is also a qualified military pilot and a helicopter pilot.

Since 1975, he has served as a career officer in the Royal Thai Army. He served as a staff officer in the Directorate of Army Intelligence, and in 1978 he became head of the King's Own Bodyguard Battalion.

In keeping with tradition, HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn ordained as a monk for a season in 1978.

He currently holds the ranks of general in the Royal Thai Army, admiral in the Royal Thai Navy and air chief marshal in the Royal Thai Air Force.

In 2005, HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn earned his wings as a pilot for the Boeing 737-400, and according to a Public Relations Department report, received a piloting certificate from the Department of Civil Aviation. The report reads: "His Royal Highness is now a 'borrowed' pilot from the Royal Thai Air Force, for the purpose of flying for Thai Airways International, in accordance with the agreement between the Royal Thai Air Force and Thai Airways International on August 9, 2004.

In May 2009, he celebrated 3,000 hours of commercial flight time on the Boeing 737-400. In recent years, as HM the King has taken on fewer public engagements because of age and frail health, HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn has taken up more and more of these ceremonial duties. On Jan 3, 1977, HRH Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn married ML Soamsawali Kitiyakara. They have one daughter, HRH Princess Bajrakitiyabha. In 1994, the Crown Prince married Mom Sucharini Vivajrawongse who gave birth to five children: MC (HSH Prince) Chudhavajra Vivajrawongse, MC Vajaresra Vivajrawongse, MC Chakrivajra Vivajrawongse, MC Vajravira Vivajrawongse and MC Busayanampetch Mahidol, now HRH Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana.

In 2001, he married HRH Princess Srirasm and they have one son, HRH Prince

Dhipankara Rasmijoti.