

Thailand's cabinet acknowledges appointment of a new king

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Reuters

Thailand's cabinet today acknowledged the appointment of a new king, Defence Minister Prawit Wongsuwan said, more than one month after the death of revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

The death of the much loved King Bhumibol on Oct. 13 plunged the South-East Asian nation into mourning. Most Thais have known no other monarch.

According to procedure, the cabinet will ask the president of parliament to invite Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn to become king. The prince will then have to accept the invitation in order for him to be proclaimed king.

"After this, we enter the parliamentary process," Prawit told reporters. "We expect an audience [with the prince] within the next one to two days."

Reuters reported exclusively on Oct 31 that Thailand was making preparations for the crown prince to ascend the throne on Dec 1.

King Bhumibol, who was the longest-serving head of state in the world when he died at the age of 88, played a stabilising role during decades of often violent conflict in Thailand.

The crown prince's invitation to become monarch will likely allay some public concerns the succession might not go according to plan.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said last month the prince had asked to delay the succession in order to grieve with the public.

The prince has not spoken publicly since his father's death and news about his plans has come through the government.

Rama X

The prince, who will be known as King Rama X, or the 10th king of the 234-year-old Chakri Dynasty, can only be formally crowned after his father's royal cremation, which will take place next year.

Thailand will begin building the funeral pyre for the late King Bhumibol next year, the government said last week, adding that 8,000 people will be involved in the cremation ceremony.

The prince, who is in Germany, will fly back to Thailand later this week so an audience with the president of parliament can then take place, sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

“Today we are waiting for the government to send a letter to parliament. We expect this to happen imminently,” said a member of the National Legislative Assembly, who declined to be named because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

In a departure from the usual Tuesday cabinet meeting, members of the cabinet and the junta met jointly at Bangkok’s Government House today, according to a Reuters reporter at the scene.

Prayuth, who took power from an elected government in a 2014 coup, has said that a year-long mourning period for the king will not affect a general election the junta has promised to hold in 2017.

The military, which has traditionally portrayed itself as the ultimate defender of the monarchy, is widely expected to remain a key power broker even after the 2017 general election.

A Thai lese-majesty, or royal insult, law criminalises anything that is deemed to be an insult to the monarchy.

The law has curbed public talk about the succession or criticism about the crown prince, who has spent much of his adult life abroad and does not command the same level of devotion as his father.

- *Reuters*

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