

# Gripped by grief, Thais mourn death of beloved monarch

By Vijay Joshi and Todd Pitman  
The Associated Press

**B**ANGKOK — Thailand began its first day in 70 years without a king earlier this month in a profound state of mourning, as the crown prince asked for more time before ascending the throne following the death of his father and the world's longest-reigning monarch, Bhumibol Adulyadej.

The government declared a public holiday and people across the shaken nation dressed in black, their eyes swollen and red with hours of weeping. Many were still breaking down and sobbing — in building halls, elevators, shops — in spontaneous outbursts of emotion that reflected the deep love and respect Bhumibol commanded in Thailand.

The 88-year-old king had spent much of the last decade hospitalized for a variety of ailments, and the momentous news, announced in a palace statement, had long been both anticipated and feared. But the nation remained stable and life continued largely as usual with most shops, banks, and tourist sites open.

A one-year mourning period for the government has been declared together with a 30-day moratorium on state and official events. But as previously speculated, no demands have been made of the private sector. The government has only urged people to refrain from organizing entertainment events for a month,



**MONARCH MOURNED.** Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej, left photo, is pushed in a wheelchair while leaving Siriraj Hospital to preside over the royal cremation of his cousin, Princess Bejaratana Rajasuda Sirisobhabannavadi, in Bangkok, in this April 9, 2012 file photo. Earlier this month, the 88-year-old king passed away after his blood pressure dropped and his liver and kidneys stopped working properly. In the right photo, Thais prayed for the king at Siriraj Hospital where he had been treated before his passing.

apparently mindful of the need to ensure that the sputtering economy does not suffer. Tourism is one of Thailand's biggest revenue earners, and entertainment remains an integral part of it.

The public holiday was declared the morning after people had already come to work. The stock market and banks remained open, as did Thai embassies worldwide. After plunging for days, the Thai stock market opened up, rising more than four percent in morning trading in a sign of renewed confidence in the economy.

"The stock market, investments, other



businesses should not stop. Do not try to let the country lose its credibility, especially in the case of impact on the stock exchange," Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said.

In Bangkok, residents lined the streets where the king's body passed in a royal procession from Siriraj Hospital to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, or Wat Phra Kaew, located on the grounds of the ornate Grand Palace.

"It is a great loss for Thai people," said Siwanart Phra-Anan, an office worker in the financial district. "His Majesty will be

in Thai people's heart forever."

"I'm lost for words because since I was born, I had him as a father of the nation and he unified us," said another, Siwane Varikornsakul. "I've never been in this situation before. I don't know what to say. My heart is numb."

Prayuth said Bhumibol's son, Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, succeeds the king under the constitution. But he said the prince had asked for more time to mourn with the nation before ascending the throne. No date has been set for his

Continued on page 7

## Nepal's most popular Buddhist nun is a musical rock star

By Binaj Gurubacharya  
The Associated Press

**K**ATHMANDU, Nepal — There is one Buddhist nun everyone in Nepal knows by name — not because she's a religious icon and a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, nor for her work running a girl's school and a hospital for kidney patients.

Ani Choying Drolma is famous as one of the country's biggest pop stars.

With more than 12 albums of melodious Nepali tunes and Tibetan hymns that highlight themes of peace and harmony, the songstress in saffron robes has won hearts across the Himalayan nation and abroad.

"I am totally against the conservative, conventional idea of a Buddhist nun," the 45-year-old nun said. Some people "think a Buddhist nun should be someone who does not come out in the media so much, who is isolated ... always in a monastery, always shy. But I don't believe in that."

Neither do her fans, who greet her with a roar of applause whenever she walks out on stage, and fall silent as she closes her



eyes to sing.

"Every time I get frustrated with life or get angry, I just listen to Ani's music and I calm down," said one fan, Sunil Tuladhar. "She is my music goddess."

But with a career deviating sharply from what conservatives in Nepal believe to be the proper path of a Buddhist, she's caught criticism as well. One Buddhist monk at the famed Swayambhu Shrine questioned how she can reconcile the simple life of a religious ascetic with the fame and wealth

she's amassed over her two-decade musical career.

"How can a nun be making money by selling her voice, living a luxurious life, and yet claim she is a nun?" Surya Shakya asked.

Despite her fame, Drolma looks every bit the typical Nepalese Buddhist nun, with her hair shaved short and an ever-present smile. She travels the world giving concerts in countries including the United States, Brazil, China, and India.

**SONGSTRESS IN SAFFRON ROBES.** Buddhist nun and musician Ani Choying Drolma performs during a concert in Mumbai, India. She is one Buddhist nun everyone in Nepal knows by name, not because she's a religious icon and a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, nor for her work running a girl's school and a hospital for kidney patients, but because she is one of the country's biggest pop stars. With more than 12 albums of melodious Nepali tunes and Tibetan hymns that highlight themes of peace and harmony, the songstress in saffron robes has won hearts across the Himalayan nation and abroad. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)

Popular composer Nhyoo Bajracharya, who has worked with Drolma, describes her music as a fusion of traditional Tibetan and Nepali styles. "They are religious songs, slow rock with flavors of blues and jazz combined," he said.

But Drolma believes her singing goes beyond delivering a catchy tune. Her 2004 hit "Phoolko Aankhama," which means "Eyes of the Flower" in the Nepali language, features lyrics that touch on religious teachings: "May my heart always be pure/May my words be always word of wisdom/May the sole of my feet never kill

Continued on page 7

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