

# A close-up view of His Majesty

## (A Regal Example)

This is a very interesting and rather easy-to-read feature, but it is also very long. Thus, I will only cover the first page – which itself is over 1300 words including the introduction. Since a lot of people are likely to be interested – many of whom are not very experienced in reading English – let's do this section in small bits. Altogether, I have divided it into eight parts.

### ***Introduction***

This is only section of the feature that does not come from Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Srinthorn. You'll notice that it also introduces first section of the feature, the section that we are going to read together today.

Get the facts right. Go to the source. Listen to the people. Build coordination between different state agencies. And never give up. Whether it's a royal effort to improve the livelihood of the rural poor or to fight floods for Bangkokians, His Majesty the King always operates on the same working principles – as recounted here by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Srinthorn.

As His Majesty's daughter and personal secretary, the Princess probably knows best how His Majesty works – with a thorough understanding of the country's big picture while always maintaining an eye for detail.

The following is a transcript of a well-known interview with the Princess' which clearly shows His Majesty's dedication to the people, His absolute selfdiscipline and His tireless quest for knowledge that has made him the world's hardest working monarch.

**source** – a person who has or gives information

**coordination** – making sure that all people or groups are working smoothly together

**rural** – of the countryside rather than the town or city

**recounted** – told

**transcript** – a written text of a conversation, interview or speech

**dedication** – giving a great deal of time and effort to something because you feel it is important

**absolute** – complete

**self-discipline** – behaving and working in a very controlled way without being told to do so by others

**tireless** – working hard and refusing to rest or give up

**quest** – a long and difficult search

**monarch** – a king or queen

## ***Concept of development***

You might recall my lesson earlier in the week based on a story reporting that His Majesty the King is going to receive a major UN award for country development. From this feature, you will see that it the reward is being given for a good reason: The King deserves it.

No one can tell the story better than HRH Princess Maha Chakri Srinthorn who has accompanied her father on countless trips around the country. (That's her, just behind the King in the photo) And, like her father, she has an excellent eye for detail.

This section of the feature is based on an interview, so it is spoken rather than written language. Spoken language tends to be easier and less formal than written language and that is the case here.

In this short introductory section of the interview you will get an idea of His Majesty's concept of economic development and a brief idea of his hands-on working style.

His Majesty's primary task is to do his best to develop the country. However, his idea of development is not just to go into a village and blindly give directions.

First, he must know all the geographical conditions of the area – the height, depth, everything. It seems he knows the entire country very well. That's because he's got first-hand experience. Which he believes is very important.

And that's why he always drives himself during field trips and doesn't mind walking. He says it gives him insight into a place.

When travelling by other types of vehicle, like helicopter, he also uses these chances to review and correct maps. He would be very angry if we fell asleep. He said that to ride in a helicopter – using petrol paid for by the public – is a privilege, and therefore we must make the most of it, for the good of the people. We can't just listen to the whirr of the engine and go to sleep. Still, His Majesty is the only one who always observes the terrain below and compares it with what was shown on maps and aerial photographs.

**blindly** – without thinking, listening to others, etc.

**first-hand experience** – experiencing something for yourself instead of hearing about it, seeing a film, reading a book about it, etc.

**insight** – an accurate and deep understanding of something

**privilege** – a special advantage that most other people don't have

**terrain** – the physical features (hills, mountains, valleys, etc.) of an area of land

**aerial photographs** – photos of the land below taken from an airplane

## ***Aerial photos***

In this short section, you will learn about the King's interest and use of aerial photos for mapmaking. Find out where he gets his photos. Is it only from government sources? You'll also read a short passage about how the Princess once "helped" her father organise the pictures he was using for a project.

It takes a long time to make a map, and sometimes by the time the map is finished, the landscape has already changed, for example, new settlements, new reservoirs that change watercourses, and so on.

I don't know exactly when His Majesty began to use aerial photographs. But the furthest back I can recall is one day when I was little, and he asked me to help him arrange pictures of a project. I remember I quit to go out and play when the work was only half done. That's why I didn't gain knowledge in this field.

The aerial photos he uses are provided by the Royal Thai Survey Department and the Air Force's Directorate of Aerial Reconnaissance. Instead of using two reference pictures like we do, His Majesty can just look at a photograph and plot things down on the map. But sometimes he has trouble with mosaic pictures because in such pictures the same house can appear in two places.

He doesn't just use the photos provided by government agencies but also takes some himself. He always brings along both compact and SLR cameras. Like when the construction of a dam is completed, he would take pictures of the dam and the engineers. He keeps these pictures in catalogues.

Every time he rides in a helicopter, he takes pictures of the landscape below. Afterwards he lays the pictures out and tapes them together. The result is a makeshift aerial photograph which can be used for planning development projects.

**landscape** – the things you can see when you look across an area of land  
**settlements**– places where people live in groups, such as villages, towns or cities

**reservoirs** – lakes, often man-made, for storing water

**recall** – remember

**reconnaissance** – the act of getting information about a place, usually military information

**mosaic pictures** – a picture made from combining several smaller pictures

**catalogues** – books which are used to organise pieces of information, photos, etc.

**makeshift** – used from things that are available instead of a ready-made product

## ***Weather maps***

To become an expert in economic development and planning, you need knowledge from a wide number of fields. Since weather plays an essential role in the health of the land, it is not surprising that His Majesty has a strong interest in **meteorology**. Find out what he has done to develop his skills and how he uses his knowledge of **weather forecasting**.

Speaking of maps and aerial photos, I must also talk about His Majesty's use of satellite images. They are one of the things he is interested in because he has long been involved in agricultural planning, and particularly working on artificial rain. To help in agricultural planning and the making of artificial rain, you need to have knowledge of the wind and rain, of meteorology.

Every day for the past 10 to 20 years, the Department of Meteorology has sent His Majesty the daily weather forecast map. Lately, they also send him the meteorological satellite photos.

His Majesty would then read the weather forecast map and the satellite images, make notes, and plot the paths of storms, their names, and the effects they tend to create. This information would be used in determining the development of agriculture and water sources.

**meteorology** – the scientific study of the weather, especially to be able to predict it

**weather forecasting** – predicting what the weather will be like

**artificial** – not natural; man-made

**plot** – to mark points on a graph to show a path

**water sources** – places where water is available

## ***Keeping Bangkok dry***

The King has long been an expert in water management and he has often put his knowledge to use in helping Bangkok overcome its annual flood problem. Here, the Princess tells us about how he went about his work during a time of particular difficulty.

In 1986, Bangkokians faced a big flood problem. Seeing the people's hardship and equipped with his map-reading habit, His Majesty believed he might find a way to alleviate the situation and fix some damage.

I had seen him working on his plan before the flood. First he hunted around for Bangkok maps, from the oldest ones he could find to the most current ones. Then he arranged them in chronological order to compare the city and its water drainage system during different ages. He also studied old aerial photographs.

When the flood crisis was about to begin, he went out to observe several areas. I didn't go with him so I can't give much detail. I once followed him after he left but couldn't find him. Instead, I got stuck in a tremendous flood, so I decided to go back home. But from what he told me, whenever he goes on such observation trips he brings along officials from several agencies—the Irrigation Department, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and other concerned agencies.

**alleviate** – to make something unpleasant become less unpleasant, intense or severe

**chronological order** – in the order of time, i.e., the oldest, then the next oldest, etc.

**water drainage system** – a system to allow water to flow away from an area

## ***Record keeping***

His Majesty knows the importance of getting accurate information. In this section, you will find out how he makes sure that he is getting such information.

And like when he plans for rural development, His Majesty looks at each area to see how water naturally flows in and out of it. For different areas have different problems. If we look at it superficially, we tend to think it is the same flood problem.

But His Majesty looks at each place very closely and sees that they are actually different. He considers every factor that contributes to the flood. And during his surveys he uses every person he knows, even if they are not engineers and not related to engineering.

Policemen, for example. He would ask them to measure the water level and report it to him. He also asked a friend who lived in the flooded area to measure the water level at his house every day and keep him informed.

His Majesty also uses people he doesn't know by having people he knows ask their friends to keep records of the water level every morning and evening so he could use the information for his planning.

When he visits an area he would explain the system of that area and how its problem could be solved as well as how things work in other areas.

**superficially** – not deeply; seeing only the most obvious and noticeable aspects of something

**contribute to** – to be one of the causes of something

**keeping records** – writing down information and keeping it so that people can refer to it in the future

## ***Skilled negotiator***

In development, you need to regularly deal with the ordinary people who live in an area. You might think this would not be something for a King, but then you wouldn't know the Thai King. In this section, you will get an interesting insight into how he deals with the local people. Does he act like an all-powerful king?

These days he understands Bangkok more thoroughly. He understands the water pattern in each canal – its flood and ebb tides and what happens when it wreaks

havoc, what goes wrong.

Some canals are no longer natural drains because they are blocked. For instance, in one case someone was growing banana trees that blocked a canal. His Majesty gently asked people in the neighbourhood who the trees belonged to.

When the owner showed up, His Majesty asked him: “How much do you care for these trees?” And the man replied: “Not so much.” To this His Majesty said: “Not so much means you still care a little.”

He knew the man had consideration for him. So His Majesty told him that he didn’t want to bully him but: ‘If you don’t care for them so much, please allow me to have them cleared out.’ He always negotiates diplomatically like this.

**negotiate** – to talk about a problem or situation in order to find a solution or reach an agreement

**ebb tide** – the time of the day when the sea gradually falls to a lower level as the tide moves away from the land

**wreak havoc** – to badly damage or prevent something from functioning normally

**gently** – softly; not forcefully

**bully** – to use your strength or power to frighten someone

**diplomatically** – carefully about how you say or do things

### ***Using all sources***

In this final section for today's lesson, we learn about the King's use of multiple sources and expertise for solving development problems. There is a lesson for all of us here. Think how much better the country will be if our leaders would follow his example.

Sometimes he gives ideas to officials and passes on the work to them. He would use anybody who could possibly help him with information. His idea is to gather all the information and keep it systematically and comprehensively. For example, we can’t just use hydro-engineering to explain a flood. There are several factors involved – meteorological elements, water in Bangkok, water flowing down from the northern part of the country, and the tides from the gulf.

His Majesty seeks information from all sources. For example, officials concerned with hydrography, meteorology, irrigation and power generating. And many more. That’s how he builds his database.

**comprehensively** – including everything that is needed or relevant