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Thai king strips titles of 'disloyal' royal consort



A trove of pictures released by the Thai royal palace showed the royal noble consort engaged in a series of activities, including flying a plane

Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn attends the annual Royal Ploughing Ceremony in central Bangkok, Thailand

● She was dismissed from the rank of Chao Khun Phra -- or noble consort

● Suthida - the former deputy head of the royal bodyguard - was made Queen in May

● Rama X came to power in 2016 after the death of his father Bhumibol Adulyadej

AFP | Bangkok

Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn has stripped his 34-year-old consort of all titles for "disloyalty" and apparent "ambition" to match the Queen's position, a royal command issued late yesterday said, less than three months after she

was bestowed with the honour. Former royal bodyguard Sineenat Wongvajirapakdi -- known by her nickname "Koi" -- was gifted the title on the king's 67th birthday on July 28, the first time in nearly a century a Thai monarch has taken a consort.

A few days later the palace released images of the short-haired Sineenat in combat fatigues shooting weapons, flying a jet and preparing to parachute from a plane, as well as holding the king's hand.

It was an intimate and rare glimpse into the private life of Thailand's powerful, ultra-wealthy and inscrutable monarch, known as Rama X of the Chakri dynasty.

But yesterday Sineenat's swift and public downfall was relayed on national television.

She was dismissed from the rank of Chao Khun Phra -- or noble consort -- for "disloyalty to the king" according to the command, as well as "acting

against the appointment of the Queen (Suthida)... for her own ambitions". Suthida - the former deputy head of the royal bodyguard - was made Queen in May, becoming King Vajiralongkorn's fourth wife.

The Thai monarchy is protected by a harsh defamation law, making open discussion on the institution for the public and media based inside the country all but impossible.

Rama X has dramatically bolstered his authority since his 2016 ascension to the throne, pulling the immense wealth of the crown under his direct control and restructuring key army units to his command.

Koi, a qualified pilot and former army nurse, was the first woman to receive the consort title in nearly a century -- fitting a pattern of assertive moves by the king.

Stripped of all ranks

Her actions show "she does not give any honour to the king

and does not understand royal tradition... her actions are to benefit herself", the statement said, adding she was attempting to elevate her position to the same as Queen Suthida.

Her behaviour is "deemed disrespectful to His Majesty's grace... and caused divisions among courtiers and misunderstanding among the people", the statement added.

She was stripped of all military ranks, decorations and royal titles, it said.

Born in the northern province of Nan on January 26, 1985, Sineenat, graduated from the Royal Thai Army Nursing College at the age of 23.

She has also trained as a pilot in Thailand and abroad, served in the King's royal bodyguard unit, and in May was awarded the rank of a major-general.

During the elaborate three-day coronation ceremony of the king in May, Sineenat was seen marching in full military uniform in a procession that trav-



The new king, a cycling and aviation enthusiast, is a more remote figure to the public, having spent much of his time abroad, particularly in Germany.

His three-day coronation gave many Thais their first full glimpse of the new monarch, as he was carried on a palanquin in full regalia around Bangkok's historic quarter.

elled from the palace to several Buddhist temples.

Her prominence stunned the Thai public, who often glean clues of the royal family's secretive ongoing through imagery and symbolism relayed by the palace.

Her dramatic fall from grace is likely to be as carefully dissected over coming days.

"The abrupt move by the king tells us that he wishes to be seen as a very in-charge monarch who will not put up with possible divisions in the royal institution," said analyst Paul Chambers of Naresuan University.

Buttressed by the conservative arch royalist military, which has carried out a dozen coups since the 1932 establishment of a constitutional monarchy, frank discussion of palace affairs is rare among the Thai public.

Rama X came to power in 2016 after the death of his father Bhumibol Adulyadej -- who is widely revered by Thais and seen as a figure of moral authority.

HK leader visits mosque struck by blue water-cannon dye

● Police use the dye -- often mixed with an irritant -- as a way to identify protesters

Hong Kong

Hong Kong's pro-Beijing leader and the city's police chief visited a mosque yesterday that was struck with blue dye from a water cannon during the latest bout of violent protests.

The entrance to the Kowloon Mosque, the international hub's largest, was sprayed by a water cannon truck on Sunday, causing anger among both local Muslims and protesters.

Police use the dye -- often mixed with an irritant -- as a way to identify protesters but it has frequently left streets and buildings daubed in a garish blue.

Video footage shot Sunday showed the truck pulling up



Kowloon Mosque representatives said Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam apologised for the dye incident, and that it was accepted

outside the building during confrontations with protesters, pausing and then spraying around half a dozen journalists and bystanders who were gathered on the street outside.

The group, who did not appear to be protesters, was struck twice, with much of the bright

blue jet painting the mosque's entrance and steps.

Police released a statement on Sunday saying the mosque was hit by mistake but did not apologise.

On Monday, Chief Executive Carrie Lam and police chief Stephen Lo paid a brief visit to the



Hong Kong police have used blue dye as a way to identify protesters during confrontations

mosque, surrounded by a phalanx of security guards.

They emerged some 20 minutes later without speaking to the media.

Mosque representatives told reporters that the two had apologised for the water cannon incident and that the apology had

been accepted.

The representatives also thanked worshippers and Hong Kongers who flocked to clean the mosque soon after the incident. The original Kowloon Mosque was built in the late nineteenth century to cater for Muslim soldiers from British-ruled India.

It was rebuilt in the early 1980s and remains a centre of Hong Kong's 300,000-strong Muslim community.

Lam's office and the police did not respond to requests for comment on the visit.

A police source told AFP the commissioner did apologise and further details would be released later in the day.

Hong Kong was convulsed by another day of violence on Sunday as the city nears five months of seething pro-democracy protests.

Tens of thousands joined an unauthorised but peaceful afternoon rally which quickly descended into chaos as small groups of hardcore protesters threw petrol bombs and rocks at a police station, mainland China businesses and multiple subway station entrances.

Police responded with water cannon, tear gas and rubber bullets in clashes that lasted well into the night.