

“SANAM LUANG”



Sanam Luang or Phramen Ground has been there since the founding of Bangkok. It was written in the chronical as follow :

In front of Wat Mahathat Sanam Luang lies between the Royal Palace and the Palace to the Front. When royal cremation was held at the Phramen Ground, the pyre set up in the centre with the Royal Palace Pavilion to the south and the one of the Prince of the Palace to the Front to the north. The music from the the Royal Palace and from the Palace to the Front would be played on opposite sides of Sanam Luang".

Sanam Luang was in the first place called "Thung Phramen (The Royal Cremation Ground)" because in the old days Sanam Luang was used for cremations of Kings and Queen and High-ranking princes. King Rama VII who passed away in England was an exception. The last cremation that took place there was for the Queen Grandmother, Somdej Phra Sri Nakarindra Boromarajachondeni in A.D. 1997. King Rama IV changed the name from "Thung Phramen" to "Thong Sanam Luang" but is now shortened to "Sanam Luang". The original area was quite small land was only and open field between the Royal Palace and the Palace to the Front, about half the size of the site today. The area of Sanam Luang is about 30 acres according to Royal Decree (book 94 part 126) announced on 13th, A.D. 1977. The Fine Arts Department has listed it as a

historical site. The reason why more land was added to it is that King Rama V considered that the land of the Palace to the Front was too extensive and the new law of accession made the heir to the throne Crown Prince instead of Prince of the Palace to the Front. So King Rama V ordered that the walls, fronts and mansions to the east of the Palace to the Front, which were deteriorating, be pulled down in order that more open space might be added to Sanam Luang. He also ordered the tamarind trees to be planted around Sanam Luang to give shade. Thus the area of Sanam Luang was widened to its present size.

Sanam Luang has been used since the time of King Rama I. It was the place for royal ceremonies and functions. Including the cremation of the Prince of the Palace to the Front, who was Rama I's brother. King Rama II followed this example of performing royal ceremonies there, including the cremation of the Prince of the Palace to the Front of his reign, who was also his beloved brother. The Royal Chronicles mention the close link between the two brothers as follows: "At the beginning of the season of the trade wind, the king flew a Chula kite in front of the temple of the Emerald Buddha and the Prince of the Palace to the Front flew a Pakpao kite (plain kite) at Sanam Luang". King Rama III wished to make known to foreign countries the prosperity of the country, so there were rice fields even closed to the Royal Palace, and he had the people store grain in readiness for difficult times. At that time the Vietnamese often visited the country and sometimes there were disputes between the Vietnamese and the Thai over the Cambodian border. In times of peace the King set up a royal pavilion to watch over the paddy fields. King Rama IV set up a place for performing the Ploughing Ceremony and the Ceremony of Calling the Rain where low walls were put up and a small hall was built to place the Buddha image for the Ceremony. Pavilions and towers were built near the king's seat when he watched the ploughing ceremony. Next to the king's pavilion there was a stage where plays were performed as part of the ritual of propitiating the gods. Outside the wall there was a barn where the rice would be stored.

King Rama V enlarged Sanam Luang and pulled down all the buildings which were used for the ceremonies of former kings and it was no longer necessary to grow rice near the Royal Palace. The space was needed for the preparation of the Centennial Celebration of Bangkok in A.D. 1897 which took place soon after King Rama V's return from Europe. It was a grand

celebration also corresponding to the king's fiftieth birthday. Sanam Luang was still the place for kite flying.

King Rama VI again used the place in the same manner as former kings to perform various ceremonies. Also, it was used as a race-track, and golf-course since more foreigners came to visit and stay in the country. During the time of King Rama VII and Rama VIII, things were different. The present king uses Sanam Luang only for Ploughing Ceremony.

