

Vietnam's 'King of Danang' Nguyen Ba Thanh mourned by all

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VIETNAM

David Wilson in Da Nang

Lunar New Year celebrations were being toned down in Da Nang this week as the central Vietnamese city mourned the death of a former top official.

Nguyen Ba Thanh, 62, head of Vietnam's Central Interior Commission, died on Friday from cancer, an official said.

A widely admired senior figure in the country's ruling Communist Party, Thanh, known as "the King of Da Nang", enjoyed rare personal popularity in a nation better known for bureaucratic apparatchiks. As the city mourned his loss, the Lunar New Year fireworks were among the events cancelled this week.

Hundreds of people gathered near his Da Nang house to pay their respects to the man who led the city from 1997 to 2013 and helped it develop a vibrant tourism industry and emerge as a growing tech hub.

One mourner, Nguyen Thi Hoang Oanh, said: "Everyone from little children to adults loved him. Uncle Ho [Chi Minh] was number one. Thanh was number two. I wonder about the future, if there will be another leader like him."

When the poor sat outside Thanh's home he invited them in and addressed their problems, Oanh said. "I am afraid. I am scared there is nobody like him who can lead Danang. He would do anything for the people, though they did nothing for him. People wanted him to live for 100 years," Oanh said.

Another mourner among the hundreds paying respects, housewife Tran Thi Thu, from Thanh's village Hoa Tien, said many people had enjoyed better lives thanks to him. "It was a great loss. He did a lot for people, but people could not do anything for him," Thu said.

Vietnam expert Jonathan London, of Hong Kong's City University, blogged that Thanh's many supporters would fondly remember his support of transparent, efficient government.

He also praised Thanh's oratory skills. "Among Nguyen Ba Thanh's most notable qualities was his ability to speak at very great length - sometimes as long as three hours - but in a disarmingly free-wheeling, often persuasive, and consistently playful and humorous way that made his public speeches and pronouncements a spectacle, winning him additional admiration among his fans and begrudging respect among his sceptics," London wrote.

Additional reporting by Agence France-Presse

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