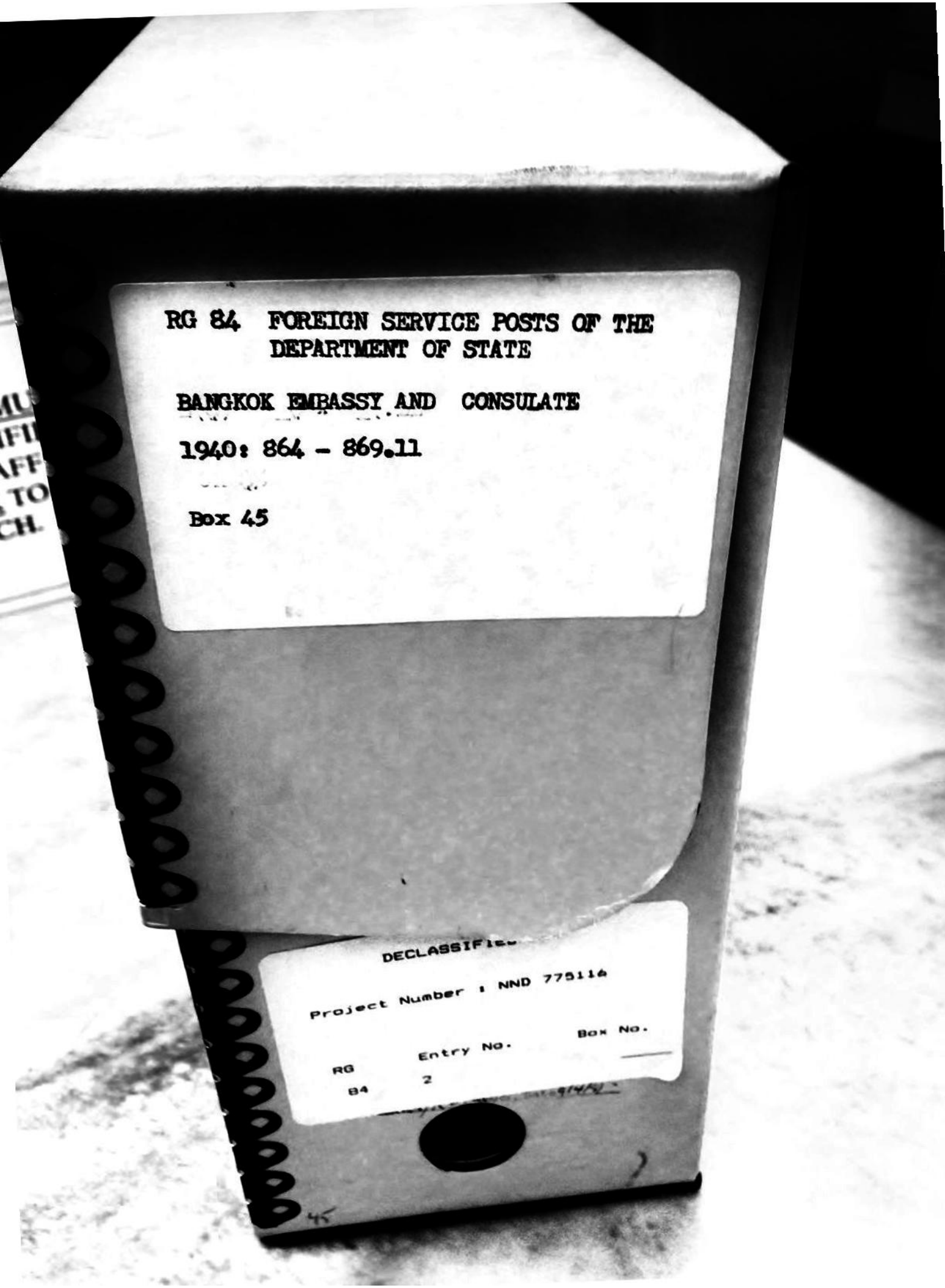

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PUBLIC PRESS.

Bangkok, March 5, 1940.

FILE COPY

No. 656

Subject: Press Interview by Prime Minister.

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The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to report that in an interview given to the press by the Prime Minister, Major General Luang Pibul Songgram, the latter stated that there was a possibility of holding a plebiscite to determine whether the period of political transition should be extended beyond the ten year period decided on when the Revolution took place in 1932. (At present, half the members of the People's Assembly are appointed, and political parties are not permitted, a condition which will no longer obtain when the present constitution has been in force for ten years.)

Among other things discussed was the recent cholera

It is not clear from the reports of the interview just how this statement was made - whether it was in reply to an inquiry, or whether it was a sort of Ballon d'essai on the part of the Prime Minister himself. At any rate this is the first recent reference to the course to be followed at the end of the so-called period of transition by any one in a responsible position.

The Prime Minister also touched on a number of other subjects, some in a rather facetious manner, when he said that he would be glad if it were possible to put all "won't works" in jail, but he added that the number of qualified men in Thailand was limited, and that he was having a hard time to find suitable persons to fill Ministerial posts abroad, and he hoped too that Cabinet members would find it possible to train up younger men to fill Cabinet positions. He found being a Minister of State with so many portfolios rather difficult. The fact seems to be that the Government is finding it difficult to inculcate a sense of discipline among the Thai people, who are pretty good farmers, but do not take kindly to regular manual labor in cities.

There was some discussion of the broadcasts in the Thai language from Chungking and Saigon, which the Prime Minister seemed to approve of rather than resent, considering it a compliment to the country that the Thai speech should be used by a foreign broadcasting station. According to the account of the interview, the Prime Minister was informed that the British broadcasting station at Singapore might introduce a Thai broadcast as well.

Among other things discussed was the recent cholera and plague outbreak. The Prime Minister assured the interviewers that the health authorities had taken energetic

measures

measures to control the situation and seemed now to have it in hand.

Press accounts of the interview, taken from the Bangkok Times and Bangkok Chronicle, (British and Thai owned respectively) are enclosed.

Respectfully yours,

Edwin L. Neville
American Minister

Enclosures:

1. Press account, Bangkok Times.
2. Press account, Bangkok Chronicle.

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ELR/tee

A true copy of the signed original