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Battle of Wits

Editor-in-Chief Theh Chongkhadikij assesses the Communist threat

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AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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I RETURNED FROM THE NORTHEAST TO FIND LIFE GOING ON NORmally in the city — the Bangkok-Thon Buri Metropolitan City or whatever.

The National Executive Council continues in office. Merchants scramble for profits. Cars imported from all over the world, including the latest posh jobs, jam the streets and pollute the air. People dress in the latest fashions, go to the movies, wine and dine, go to cocktail parties, play golf, have a massage, go dancing, set up "love nests" for minor wives, buy expensive imported goods, gossip, play bridge or poker, keep themselves happy and gay.

All these things seem so very important. Little do the city folks know that what is happening out there in the countryside may put an end to their fun—unless something is done NOW.

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AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR, THE FLAME OF THE FOREST IS IN BLOOM. The brilliant red flowers stand out against the green foliage of the jungle in the Northeast.

It is the dry season but early showers have made the jungle verdant. Inside the jungle the Reds are restless.

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THE BIGGEST NETWORK OF ROADS IN THAILAND CRISSCROSSES THE Northeast. From the most neglected region this part of the Kingdom has become the most developed — after Bangkok.

The Sarit Thanarat Government concentrated on developing the Northeast in the early and middle sixties after finding that communist agents had subverted inhabitants of remote villages in the area. The Communists succeeded because the poor living conditions resulting from government neglect made the people fertile ground for the sowing of seeds of discontent and discord.

Of course, there were other reasons, such as misbehaviour of local officials and feelings of injustice and insecurity among the villagers, but the main factor contributing to communist progress was the poverty and the misery accompanying it.

The Government immediately went to work. The Ministry of Defence with the necessary manpower and machinery set up Mobile Development Units (MDU) to go out to the subverted areas to build roads. A new bureau — the Office of the Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) —coordinated functions of various departments at the provincial level to build more roads, dig wells, help villagers develop their own villages, train them in occupations to increase their income and indoctrinate rural youth.

The new agencies, with much duplication of activities, spread out from the original six provinces along the northeastern border to the rest of the region as the communist cancer made further inroads. The State Highways Department through contracts with private construction companies built the arterial highways while ARD roads linked them to remote villages. MDU worked in places where armed security was needed.

ARD is the only surviving agency today.

I TRAVELLED BY JEEP OVER the State highways, the MDU strategic roads and the ARD feeders earlier this month to find out what is really happening in the Northeast.

I wrote my first series on communist subversion in the Northeast in early 1962 to draw the attention of the public and the Government to the facts of the situation there, to the causes and to the need for action. (SEATO republished my findings from The Bangkok Post.) To gather the facts then, I had to travel by bus, boat and cart over dusty trails.

The Northeast is so different today —on the surface. Underneath the surface the communist undercurrents still run strong.....

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THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF Thailand is very well-structured, according to Governor Charoen Panthong of Udon Thani. This was disclosed from documents captured by the authorities.

The CPT has set up an organisation paralleling the Government's. Committees are set up at the village, district, provincial and regional levels. A comrade may rise up from the ranks to the various levels and, if he has what it takes, to the national level — the politburo.

The CPT organises three villages into one district, three districts into one province and three provinces into one region.

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CHINESE COMMUNIST INFLUence over the CPT is clearly indicated by the Maoist literature used like bibles by the communist terrorists. A set of nine volumes of Maoism is believed used for political indoctrination and military training. The Governor of Udon has managed to obtain six volumes of one set.

An intelligence report states that about 200 cadres trained in Peking during the past few years have infiltrated back into northeastern villages to stir up and lead a Maoist revolution.

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THE ARMY OF THE CPT HAS SET a regional headquarters in the jungle-clad hills of Nongbualamphu District of Udon.

The Communists have five armies operating in the Udon/Nong Khai area:

Army No. 11 operates in Namsom, along the Mekong River, Naklang District of Udon and Sangkom of Nong Khai; No. 78 operates from command HQ in Phuphan and Ban Phu Districts; No. 78/1 is east of Phuphan range; No. 78/2 west of Phuphan; No. 78/3 in Phuhinlard, Tapfah, between the Amphoe Muang and Amphoe Nongbualamphu.

Each group is estimated to consist of 30 to 60 guerrillas, operating on a hit-and-run basis.

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WE WERE HAVING A NICE LITTLE dinner at one of the better known restaurants, in one of the provinces—some officials and myself.

"It's so discouraging. We do so much, at such risks to our lives. Yet, the big shots in Bangkok don't know," one said.

"They should come out here and see for themselves, instead of just depending on those reports meant to make it look good for certain high officials here," another said.

"I have been assigned to development work. I did so much, I was responsible for the whole province. What's my reward? I am now back to being a Nai Amphoe of a district of another province," still another said.

"I'm just going to be an ordinary civil servant, I'm not going to use my initiative any more, I'd better go along with my seniors, stay in my rut and don't rock the boat. I'd better remember birthdays of my superiors and not fail to pay them my respects on these important anniversaries. That's probably the only way I can progress in my career."

"I've been given responsibility but not the authority with which to carry it out."

I found similar complaints in every province. This is not a healthy situation—especially since the persons lined up against these officials by the other side appear to be dedicated.

The top leaders in Bangkok can do something about it. They should go out and see things for themselves. They should go without advance notice. They should not just talk to members of the official reception committee.

They should talk to the officials who go out into the fields, they should talk to the people.

Good civil servants form a bridge between the central government and the people but bad civil servants become a barrier.

One silver lining: There are fine, young men out there now who want to do a good job for their country, despite all the handicaps and the dangers. Encourage them. There are also some great Governors.

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HE IS 17, SLIGHTLY-BUILT AND has a serious demeanour. But when he breaks into a smile he looks bright, but it's only for a brief moment.

Sangvien Thinkong has just surrendered to the Governor of Udon. He was recruited by "Pradit" who took him to the jungle in Loei Province. He attended a school for guerrillas there.

The school building was of wood. He sat with 67 other students on the floor to listen to lectures.

Sangvien was taught to make land mines.

"It is quite simple. We use TNT."

He did not know whether his mines had killed anybody. He did not place the mines himself.

He was also a member of a 27-man band which moved into villages, held meetings of the inhabitants and asked them for food.

After six months in the jungle, Sangvien couldn't stand it any longer. While on a food gathering mission, he managed to escape.

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THE WATER GUSHES FORTH clear and clean from the ground. A crack team from the Water Resources Centre had drilled for, and found, a subterranean well in the compound of Wat Thamvivek in Amphoe Chonnabot in Khon Kaen.

News of the discovery spread through nearby villages and people flocked to see the miracle.

Water for drinking, for washing and for agriculture is the most important element — after air — to the Northeasterners.

The new well serves over 10,000 people in the surrounding villages. This is important because in the Northeast a person has usually to walk four to ten kilometres to get a pail of water.

The Water Resources Centre is definitely one of the most beneficial projects of ARD.

However, the Communists are very clever at capitalising on the work of the centre.

In several remote villages, after one of the centre's teams had found water and built a well, the Communists came in and claimed the well diggers were their men and had been sent by them.

The Government has at its command radio and television stations and other mass media. It should use these more effectively to get across to the villagers.

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THE COMMUNIST PROBLEM IN the Northeast is one of subversion rather than insurgency. The Communists in the region are indigenous.

They may have been trained and indoctrinated by the North Vietnamese, the Pathet Lao or the Chinese Communists but they are Thais.

The objective of the Communists in the Northeast is to infiltrate the villages, establish themselves as administrators and set up a political infrastructure to rival the central government. They then hope to widen their areas of control.

In this way they hope to surround the towns with "liberated" villages and then take over the towns, in the classic Maoist style.

This insidious movement is more dangerous on the long term than the insurgency in North Thailand. In the northern provinces it is chiefly hill tribes who have taken up arms against the Government. Most of them may be Thailand's own hill tribes and they may be led by a few Northeastern Thais but they are not racially the same as the people occupying the plains.

Because of their familiarity with the terrain, they may dominate the jungles in the hills. They may attack and take over isolated government outposts. They may come down from the hills for a quick raid with rockets and other equipment. They may ambush government patrols or hold out in jungle fastnesses against whole armies.

But they cannot gain political control of the people in the plains and without that they cannot make much headway.

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THE MAOIST STRATEGY CALLS for guerrillas to work among the people like fish in the water. Their strength, indeed their survival, depends on the support of the people.

While the Communists are fighting in the North for control of territory, the battle in the Northeast is for the loyalty of the people.

In the North the Red Meos may control the hills of Chiang Rai and Nan or may exercise a degree of control over the tri-border area of Phitsanulok, Phetchabun and Loei but they are mainly holding on to territory,

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mostly uninhabited hills. Whenever the armed bands move out or are driven out, the territory changes hands.

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THE BATTLE IN THE NORTH-east cannot be won with purely military means. It is a subtle, if total, warfare. It is total warfare because it requires employment of political, economic, social and propaganda measures in addition to military operations. It is sutble in the sense that the battle will be decided by whichever side is better or wiser in the use of all these weapons at its command.

One Thai intelligence officer told me that if we would not make up our minds to win this fight—and then go out and win it — we could lose the North-east to the Communists in three years.

From what I have seen and heard, I believe our Government could do something to save one-third of our Kingdom where one-third of our people live.

The strange thing is: except for the ideologically motivated cadres, the people sympathising with the Communists consider themselves nationalists and patriots.

Therein lies great danger—and also hope and opportunity.

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The men behind the movement

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Then there is the "Taharn Ban" (village soldier) who is unarmed but who obtains intelligence, food and other necessities for the "state soldiers."

At all levels, there is a political officer who indoctrinates the men and keeps them ideologically motivated.

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ACTUALLY THE CTS ARE Maoist guerrillas. The Government has been able to identify their main leaders in various parts of the Northeast.

Believed to be the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of Thailand or at least the top communist leader in the Northeast is an introspective man now over 50, whom the officials once thought they could try to get to change his faith.

He is Udom Srisuwan, who, in his youth in the northern province of Lampang, was secretly recruited into the Chinese Communist Party of Thailand (which has now been dissolved and incorporated into the Communist Party of Thailand). During his student days in China, then under the Nationalists, he was believed to have been groomed by the Chinese Communists.

Later, he was on the editorial staff of the pro-Communist Mahachon (Masses). He was also an adviser on the extreme Leftist weekly, "Sethakorn" (Economist).

He was one of a group of Thai journalists who visited Soviet Russia.

Udom was taken into custody as a communist suspect when Marshal Sarit came to power. However, he was released with the hope that he would turn against the Communists and work for the Government. Instead he disappeared into the forests and when next the authorities heard of him, he was in charge of the Communists in Nakae district of Sakon Nakhon.

He has proved to be a very good organiser.

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ANOTHER IMPORTANT LEADER, a member of the Politburo of the CPT, is a former MP from Surin.

Pleung Wanasri was an intense young man who sincerely wanted to stop the suffering of the poor in the Northeast. He believed that the only way to do this was through Socialism.

When he campaigned for election he did not have to buy votes, like many other candidates did. He managed to establish rapport with the people with his impassioned oratory because he spoke "from his heart out." He got elected easily, although he was a tyro campaigning against old time professionals.

He edited a radical weekly, "Pitubhum" (Fatherland).

He was also arrested after the 1958 revolution but was released. Consumption struck him in jail. He went into the jungle.

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LIKE THE AMERICANS, THE Communists in the Northeast have adopted a "low profile." First, let us talk of the Americans.

The United States Information Service (USIS) has cut down drastically on its propaganda activities in the Northeast on behalf of the Thai Government, the US Administration and the free democratic way of life. Most branches have been closed. In fact, there is hardly any USIS activity in counter insurgency.

The number of American experts has been reduced. Those few advisers in the employ of the United States Operations Mission (USOM) or under contract to it try to keep in the background as much as possible because they do not want to attract public attention to themselves.

On the other hand, the Communists have adopted a low profile in order not to attract the Government's attention while they subvert the villagers. They cannot afford government harassment while they entrench themselves. In a certain province the Governor told me that some areas were "peaceful" because there had been no news of Communist attack or activity there.

However, according to a military authority on the area, this is self deception.

"The Communists have taken over charge of the villages in the area and are even administering them. They claim the area as 'liberated.'"

By fearing to go into the area in uniform or in official vehicles, the provincial authorities are admitting that the Communists are in control of the situation there.

Such areas are where the Government must re-exert its authority. The only question is: HOW?

The Government cannot simply send in the army because if it does so it will become virtually a war between itself and the people. That must be avoided, absolutely. However, the army could move in on the armed guerrilla bands in the jungles beyond the villages. It could cut off the CPT's "state soldiers" from the villages.

The Government's soldiers, being Thais, should be able to fight the guerrillas, also Thais, on equal terms. There is no reason for a Thai guerrilla to be in any way a better soldier than a Government soldier.

While the army is fighting the guerrillas in the jungle, civil administrators should quickly re-establish Government presence in the villages. Police should isolate the "local soldiers" and the "village soldiers" from the rest of the inhabitants. Those supporters of the "liberation army" must be detained for political re-education and rehabilitation.

The Government must then provide protection for the villagers.

All these can be done if the Government is determined to do it to the extent that it is willing to reward the officials who are successful in carrying it out and penalise those who fail.

I have learned from experience that whenever a person like General Prapass Charusathiara, Deputy Chairman of the National Executive Council, goes out to a certain province and tells the officials to do a certain thing, it is done.

This shows that local officials who put their minds to a job can carry it out successfully.

The best thing is not to wait until the communists have entrenched themselves anywhere.

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SAMUEL J. BARGNESI OF CONnecticut, adviser with the ARD Water Resources Centre at Khon Kaen, is an example of how Americans do their work in the Northeast while keeping as low a profile as possible.

He reminds me of the "Ugly American" in the one-time best seller of that name by William Lederer and Eugene Burdick. In the book the Ugly American is a good American who uses his brains and hands to help villagers develop their potential in simple mechanical ways.

Mr Bargnesi has set up a workshop in the centre with surplus equipment he had managed to obtain from friends at Utapao and other bases and then reconditioned. He has also obtained old trucks and rebuilt them for work connected with well digging and construction. He had obtained the services of Battelle Research Institute of Columbus, Ohio, to develop a hand pump suitable for the Northeast, a pump that is more durable and needs less maintenance than pumps used at present.

He declined to talk about himself, and I learned about him from the Thais working with him. They said that he was a practical man and that he was strict during working hours but friendly outside work, and they found it stimulating to work with him.

He gave all the credit to his Thai colleagues.

One, Krichsak Thirawat, Chief of the Drilling Division, has been offered a job with a 5,000 baht a month salary by a private firm. He has turned it down because he is convinced that the work he is doing is really helping him save his country. He gets only 1,200 baht a month from the Government at present.

Something must be done about paying proper salaries to our officials whose technical services are necessary for national development. The Government cannot afford to lose its talented technicians to private firms — especially those who are working in sensitive provinces.

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WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL that only Government forces are involved in countering the Communist insurgency here. Involvement of American troops in any way would have made the situation look as if the United States Government was fighting to keep the Thai Government in power against an uprising, and we would have the US Senators, the Eastern Establishment press and dissident, American youth as our "foes," to

We cannot afford to let the situation here deteriorate into an "American war" like in Vietnam.

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THE GOVERNMENT MUST DECIDE now to go ahead and use all resources to fight and suppress the communist insurgency—unless it wants a situation to develop in Thailand that is like Burma or Laos.

In Burma and Laos, the Government controls the capital and major towns while the rural areas are dominated by insurgents.

The tree of Communism has been planted in Thailand. This is symbolised by the transfer of the School for Subversives for Thailand in Hoa Binh, near Hanoi, in North Vietnam, to a number of jungle schools in various parts of the Kingdom.

Communist recruits are indoctrinated and trained for revolution right within our own borders.

The roots of the tree are thus sinking deeper and deeper into the country and, with time, it is going to be harder and harder to uproot it.

If nothing drastic is done quickly, the situation would deteriorate into one in which the Communists would control most of the Northeast. However, the Government would continue in office but would have to spend more and more money on maintaining security and less and less on development. At the same time it would not be able to obtain the crops, other products and minerals of the communist-controlled areas, and it would not be able to collect taxes there.

The National Executive Council with its almost absolute power is in a position to prevent such a situation coming to pass.

If it makes up its mind to fight and defeat the insurgents it may not be able to achieve a total victory because it is too late and Communism would continue to be a problem. However, it would have effectively contained the Communists and re-exerted control over the "liberated" areas.

To bring about a situation similar to that in Malaysia rather than that in Burma or Laos, the NEC will have to think and talk counter-insurgency every day and keep close watch over operations, and developments.

The NEC has to decide on a plan of grand strategy and back it up with all sorts of resources.

If it decides on a plan involving close co-ordination among the civil service, police and the military forces, it must give all power and authority to those responsible for carrying out the strategy. If it decides on the use of only the military forces, it must back them all the way.

I believe that the CPM (civil, police and military) plan is the best because I learned during my tour that counter-insurgency operations have been most successful in those places where there is close co-ordination among the three branches of the Government.

In those years when CSOC (Communist Suppression Operations Command) was in operation, co-ordinating civil, police and military personnel of the Government at the village, district, provincial and national levels, the CTs were effectively contained. Through CSOC the authorities in various provinces even managed to regain control of communist-infested districts.

In the CPM plan, the military will directly confront the armed guerrillas; the police will protect the villagers, prevent contacts between the guerrillas and the villagers and obtain intelligence for capture of communist leaders and agents; and the civil servants will administer the areas, establish close relations with the people and form a bridge between them and the Government.

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The Reds are well organised

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ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE DOCUMENTS CAPTURED FROM THE Communists is a letter sent by a regional leader code-named "Son" to "Comrade So". It indicates high intelligence among the leaders and a firm organisational structure in the Communist Party of Thailand. It also shows that the Communists have problem about recruitment and membership.

Referring to fellow members as "sahai" (comrades), "Son" talks about the loss of important documents including books on Maoist principles, strategy and tactics, to the authorities. He says that this was a blow to the party.

Governor Charoen Panthong of Udon had laid his hands on the books and "Son's" letter. His possession of such important intelligence has helped him in his task of combatting the CTs. (Communist terrorists).

"Son" complains about the recruitment of criminal types into the party. He writes: "we don't want thieves and robbers. They make a bad name for us. Be careful about recruitment."

(Mr Charoen pointed out that the Communists were becoming selective in party membership. Previously, the Communist Party had been a haven for persons wanted by the law.)

"Son" also says that pregnant women should not be brought into the jungle for work with the party. He cites "Comrade Amphai" who was four months with child.

"Son" also advises against bringing in people with families. He says that persons with families could not attend to party activities whole-heartedly because they would be thinking of their families.

The letter calls upon the "comrades" to keep on conducting study and research into operations, including the Government's so that they could improve on tactics to defeat the government forces.

The letter refers to "Comrade Opas" who appears to be an accountant of the party taking care not only of the money but of stocks of food, clothes and other materials.

Careful accounting apparently is maintained. The supplies are held in caves. Only three persons know the locations of the caves. The caves contain uniforms as well as civilian clothes. When a guerrilla comes out of the jungle to go to town, he changes his uniform for civilian clothes.

"Son" admonishes his "comrades" not to look at situations through "rose-coloured spectacles", but concentrate on realities and facts.

He asks his colleagues to carry on "self-criticism sessions" to evaluate their work and their own worth. He even requests them to criticise his own instructions.

He says that presentation and acceptance of criticisms should be conducted in a "spirit of humility."

He appeals to his "comrades" not to smoke cigarettes even if they got them free. He warns against the picking up of a habit which they could not indulge in, in the jungle.

"Son" asks "Yo" to look carefully into the behaviour of some "comrades" who appear to be irresponsible. He asks for patience in correcting the behaviour of these miscreants.

"Son" tells of one comrade who has fallen in love with a girl in the ranks. He notes that the youth is bound to be impulsive and careless.

He orders that propaganda leaflets be quickly completed. He stresses: "We must scratch where it itches."

He says that propaganda should be made to fit the circumstances of each locality.

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THE LETTER IS A REAL EYE-opener as to how well-organised the Communists are in the jungle.

It shows that the leaders know their men very well and realise the necessity of adapting their activities to local circumstances.

The local leaders have initiative to act within the overall strategy.

On no account should we underestimate the "enemy". The Government must be represented by local leaders who are able to engage in a battle of wits with the local Communist leaders. Such leaders must be given the confidence of the Government to achieve aims set for them. They must be given the necessary authority and resources.

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ONE WOULD NOT HAVE THOUGHT the present situation possible. Thailand has homogeneity, the Buddhist religion, and the Monarchy to which the people are attached. It has never been a colony.

Yet, the Communists have been able to make serious inroads.

We cannot take things for granted and be complacent.

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THE COMMUNISTS ARE AFRAID of roads that lead to their areas of operation. The roads bring the police, the soldiers, and the civil administrators.

The Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) idea – where work of various departments concerned with economic development is co-ordinated for rapid execution – has made possible the roads leading from arterial highways and district seats to formerly isolated villages.

As the roads move forward, the CTs are forced deeper into the interior and the jungles. However, they carry out occasional ambushes on the roads, lay mines or burn bridges.

Formerly, they let the ARD workers alone because the people liked to see improvements in their villages, and they did not want to do anything to antagonise the inhabitants. However, they later realised that the development work was hurting their cause.

Critics of ARD have argued that the State Highways Department could have built the roads or the Irrigation Department could have built the dams and dug the wells – and that there is no need to set up a separate bureau for such works in the sensitive areas.

However, the point is that the State Highways Department or the Irrigation Department operates from Bangkok, plans have to be drawn up and budgets requested, it's time-consuming – and time is short in the areas where the Communists are active, day and night.

The most significant aspect of ARD is that the provincial governor can use the money, men and machinery almost at his own discretion. He knows the threats and problems in his province best.

For example, Governor Charoen Panthong of Udon Thani intends to build a road around the jungles of Nongbualamphu where the Communists have set up a regional command headquarters.

He can virtually go ahead and order the road built.

ARD has begun to use the services of private construction firms in certain areas such as Dansai District of Loei. It may find having roads built by contract to be more efficient and more economical.

This is an important trend because the machines and tools received from the United States as aid will one day become unserviceable – and it will be a huge burden on the government budget to replace them.

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A HIGH-RANKING BORDER POlice officer, all dressed up in his smart jungle-green uniform, with black beret set straight on his head, steps into the hotel restaurant in Udon.

He has come for a quick breakfast. He must be in time to catch a helicopter for Loei.

"Out after the Communist terrorists there?"

"No, I'm sorry. I have to provide escort duty for a VIP from Bangkok."

The VIP was an under-secretary of one of the ministries.

The police colonel, considered one of the best in the counter-insurgency business, is being used as an escort. He should be out leading and directing the fight against the CTs.

Of course, under-secretaries, especially when travelling in Communist-infested areas, should have escorts for security — but those who are essential for the campaign agains the CTs, should not be used for such a task.

Already, there are too few men of such calibre on the spot.

Just as the local Communist leaders can act on their own in their areas of responsibility, the Government should give authority to trusted, honest, and dedicated local commanders — police, civil, military — to use their initiative.

They are the ones who know the local situation best. They must be able to respond to an emergency on their own, with whatever resources they have.

They should act within an approved general plan to obtain defined objectives.

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UDOM SRISUWAN, MENTIONED last week, was on the editorial staff of the Sethasarn (Economic News), not the Sethakorn (Economist), as erroneously reported. "Sethakorn" was the name of the organ of the Naew Naam-Sethakorn (Economist-United Front) Party, which was dissolved together with other political parties with the takeover November 17 last year by the National Executive Council.

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GOVERNOR SORN SUTHISARN OF Sakon Nakhon revealed the names of some Communist leaders in his province.

In the Communist-designated Zone 01, including Dong Phra Chao and Dong Palad the leader is Chavalit Tapkwang. Not much is known about him.

In Zone 02 including Phu San Ta Daeng, Phu San Pah Yang and Phu Pha Daeng, Pleung Wanasri is the director with the code name of "Loong Cha Kan."

In Zone 03, including Dong Pha Lad and Dong San, the leader is Thawin Pongsakul. He is believed to have come from Ayutthya.

In Zone 04, including Phu Tam, Phu Pha Lek and Phu Mai Sak Lak, the leader is General Champa with the code name of "Por Pathom".

Champa was a former Phu Yai Ban of Amphoe Sawang Daen Din.

In Zone 05 including Phu Singh and a portion of Nong Khai and Udon. Identity of the leader is not yet disclosed.

In Zone 06 including Nong Bua Lam Phu and Sangom in Nongkhai, the leader is Boon Thurapol.

The leaders have been trained abroad, in North Vietnam, Laos or Communist China.

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THE COMMUNISTS HAVE DIVIded up the Sakon Nakhon Province and adjacent areas into "provinces" of their own.

"Europe" is Nong Bua Lam Phu.

"Asia" is the eastern part of Sakon Nakhon. Boonmee Suwanaphrom of whom not much is known is in charge.

"Sing Buri" includes Kutbak, sub-district Khao Wong and sub-district Somdej in Kalasin.

"Petchaburi" includes Amphoe Na Kae and Tao Ngoi.

"Soviet" is the name given to the Communists in sub-amphoe Sangkom in Nong Khai.

In Nakhon Phanom the leader is Pan Kawmas who is also deputy leader of the region.

He has a follower who was a former Phu Yai Ban in Um Mau named "Vinai".

"Vinai" is a secondary school graduate (Matayom 6). He receives and distributes Communist "peace" leaflets.

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ONE OF THE LEADERS WHOSE name is being kept secret for the time being has surrendered to the authorities with some weapons.

According to Major-General Yong na Nakhon of Nakhon Phanom, the defector was a high-ranking commander who had been trained in both Hanoi and Peking.

He had several times been ordered to "eliminate" some high Thai officials.

He had told the authorities about how he and other Thais were trained in Hanoi and Peking. He gave details of the military lessons he was taught.

After he had completed his course in Peking, he was sent to the Thai Nationality Autonomous State in Yunnan province of China. The state was set up in the early 50's by the Chinese Communists in an area occupied by tribes of the Thai race.

It was the original home of the Thais before the great migration into present-day Thailand during the days of Kublai Khan.

The Pibulsongkram Government had declared that establishment of the Thai Nationality Autonomous State was a provocative and aggressive act by Peking against Thailand. The measure was believed to be a long-term one aimed at annexation of Thailand to the Chinese Empire.

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UDOM SRISUWAN WHO IS BELIEved to be the secretary-general of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) is reported to be moving around Nakhon Phanom and Kalasin areas out of headquarters in the jungles of Na Kae. The Communists have declared Dong Luang, Nong Sang and Dong Kaw Luang as "liberated" areas.

Government details have uncovered 22 Communist camps, including three big ones, in Puphan jungles in Nakhon Phanom.

The camps had accommodation for 200, a badminton court, a clinic, a vegetable garden and food stores.

In the camps police found Mao buttons, Communist documents, flags bearing the Hammer-and-Sickle, pictures of Stalin, Lenin and Mao Tse-Tung.

It is estimated that there are 1,200 hard-core cadres in Nakhon Phanom.

They have organised "front" organisations among the youth, the women and the farmers in the villages. These organisations work closely with the Communist Party of Thailand.

The Communists are also seeking to join with other bodies to form a "United Front" against the Government. Main targets of the Communists in this respect are intellectuals and students.

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"THE TROUBLE WITH A VILLAGE volunteer is that in most cases, after we have given him a uniform and a gun, he ceases to be an ordinary citizen of the village."

An officer involved in the training and organisation of para-military forces explained further:

"The village volunteer usually takes the attitude that he is somehow superior to the other villagers, and he feels he possesses a certain power over them.

"He becomes arrogant sometimes. At worst he uses his new status to carry out an act of revenge against an old enemy in the village."

I heard tales of abuses by village volunteers, some as bad as those concerning corrupt policemen or misbehaving soldiers. Usually one or two police officers are placed in charge of the para-military forces to prevent abuses and to ensure that they carry out their duty. As far as possible, the best possible young men are selected from volunteers for service.

There are various types of local forces:

1. People's Action Team (PAT), a group set up to assist and work with the villagers.
2. Home Guards, consisting of civilian volunteers.
3. Village Security and Defence Force (VSDF), village volunteers assigned to security functions.
4. Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC), whose members are part of the Territorial Defence Corps.
5. Village Security and Development Unit (VSDU) comprising villagers who have volunteered to keep the peace in the village and assist in development work.
6. Hunter-Killer Teams.

The last named has the most dramatic function: Seeking out and eliminating Communist leaders. Its job is similar to that of Communist assassins who kill off local government leaders.

The teams are usually made up of defectors who are ready to venture back to the jungles to put a bullet through their former leaders.

The Hunter-Killer Teams are a double-edged sword. By killing the Communist leaders, they could cause confusion in the Communist ranks and bring about greater defections.

On the other hand the Hunter-Killers could use their "license to kill" (like 007's) by carrying out personal vendettas.

The authorities had come to realise the dangers inherent in the missions of these teams.

They are changing the name to Hunter-Capture Teams with the intention of, wherever possible, bringing in the leaders alive.

The officers have also come to the realisation that they must be very careful before they shoot and kill a Communist suspect.

They may kill one but ten new enemies -- his relatives and close friends -- may rise up in his place.

But it's difficult to "bring them back" alive because the most dangerous game is Man.

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Officials hold the key

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THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE ouncil is taking necessary actions to ffectively handle the communist nsurgency, General Kris Sivara, ecretary-General of the NEC assured ne.

The authorities are aware of what is oing on and of the problems and difficulties.

The NEC is most certainly cogni- sa.t of the need to win the battle for he loyalty of the people against the Communists.

Our leaders realise the importance of placing good and dedicated civil servants on duty at the district and village levels—levels where they are in direct contact with the people.

The people judge the Government by the behaviour and calibre of those officials they meet on a more or less daily basis.

If the officials misbehave, they get a bad impression of the Government. If, on the other hand, communist agents in clandestine contact with them are well-behaved and show an interest in their welfare, they would think the Communists better than the Government.

Officials visiting villages should bring their own food and not require the inhabitants to kill their poultry and cook for them. If the villagers insist on giving them a meal, they should politely refuse—or, if they partake of the proffered meal, they should pay for it.

This may be against the spirit of Thai hospitality but the poor folks in the villages would suffer from the dispensation of such hospitality—and although they may smile while doing so, they may harbour internal resentment.

The village family has only a few chickens or one or two pigs, besides some rice, and they have to stretch out their supplies for as long as possible.

Officials should be courteous to villagers who have walked many kilometres to reach the district office or the police station to make a report. They should not be made to wait while the officials finish a cigarette, a cup of coffee or a newspaper.

The Government has always been trying to impress upon the members of the civil service that they are civil servants in the pay of the public, not masters or overlords of the people. I find that most of the young graduates of the Nai Amphoe School are devoted to their jobs. It may be necessary for older officials to undergo a refresher course to bring about a re-dedication to the service of the public.

The Government must make sure that its policemen are just and fair to the people. Local police must not oppress or take bribes or bend under the influence of powerful people in the locality—all these will lead to injustice.

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THERE IS AN IMPORTANT DIFference between a communist squad and a government patrol. When the Communists set out on a mission, they have to accomplish something before returning to base. When a government detail goes on patrol, it comes back when the allowances of its members have run out.

The Government should ensure that there are adequate sums for allowances for policemen, soldiers or civil officials, going out into the jungles on an assignment.

It is understandable for the men to be worried about the families they leave behind. It is also understandable that many of them feel that they are getting too low a salary or too small an allowance to go out and risk their lives.

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MOTIVATION IS SOMETHING which we cannot force down the throats of people. They have to feel the urge themselves.

That is why the Communists have concentrated so much on political indoctrination. Their soldiers become such fanatics they are willing to go out and die for their cause.

To look into the eyes of dedicated Communists on a mission gives the impression that they may have been drugged but that is not the case. Their minds have been greatly influenced by political indoctrinators.

A parallel scheme could be developed for the men on our side. There is no need to turn them into fanatics. There is only the need to make them understand the situation, the threats to the survival of the nation.

One of the most important subjects they should be taught is contemporary history. They have learned about the ancient history of the Thai race and of Thailand. They know that King, Nation and Religion are an integral part of their lives.

But they don't fully realise what is happening to our sacred trinity and our cultural heritage. Only a study of current events will make our men understand—and give them the proper motivation to go out there and defeat the "enemy".

Contemporary history should include events in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and comparisons of situations there and here. In fact contemporary history should be made an important subject in secondary school and university curricula. International developments, the global power struggle, the origins and methods of "people's wars,"--and how all these relate to Thailand—are necessary for the education of our youth.

The "teach-ins" on American college campuses, with a distorted history of events leading to the Vietnam War launched the demonstrations and riots which have caused a domestic upheaval in the United States. This shows the kind of impact the study of contemporary history can have, even if it is biased history.

There is no need for biases in the teaching of contemporary history to our youth, our officials, our soldiers, our policemen. The facts as they apply to the security of our country will be enough.

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THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY has become worse than previous years because of the introduction of North Vietnamese advisers and trainers as well as of greater firepower. With such assistance they have improved their political and military infrastructure.

As reported in an earlier article, the Communists have set up zones for military operations. The zone chiefs receive orders from the Communist Party of Thailand and also from a command headquarters in the communist-occupied territory in Sayaboury, Laos, near Nan Province.

With their new weapons the Communists have become bolder and taken the initiative in attacking police outposts or ambushing police security operations, particularly in the North. The attacks are obviously well-planned. For the first time, rockets have been used—in an attack in Chiang Rai.

The Communists' military units are small and extremely mobile. They have the capacity to re-group to form bigger units for bigger operations.

The Communists always make an assessment of the people of the village before they move in to indoctrinate them or intimidate them. They then create their own village protection teams to make the people feel that they owe their protection to the Communists.

Through the committees at the village, district and provincial levels, the Communists are trying to gain more adherents. Through the front organisations—of farmers, youth, women, etc—the Communists are conducting vicious anti-government propaganda

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and trying to exploit discontent in various places.

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THE GOVERNMENT IS INSTITUTing measures to meet the situation.

It should give certain matters close attention. It should do all it can to prevent the Communists from gaining more adherents. For this to happen, it is necessary, as mentioned earlier, to obtain the trust and confidence of the people in the local officials.

The authorities should make sure that no acts of abuse are committed by military or civil officials. It takes only a few bad officials to drive the people away from the Government into the arms of the Communists.

The Chairman of the National Executive Council, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, realises this. He recently talked to a few communist defectors who told him they had turned to the Communists because of unjust treatment.

With such knowledge Marshal Thanom should let it be known that the Government will not condone abuses and will act promptly against any abuses.

The Government should assign the right kind of officials to sensitive areas. It should get rid of bad officials, not simply transfer them. Wherever they are stationed they will cause trouble and headaches for the Government.

The Government should examine the advisability of setting up a special task force or battalion combat team in every communist-infested province. Such a force should include regular army personnel, police and volunteers thoroughly trained in jungle warfare—the Ranger type. These task forces should make continuous efforts to re-establish government control in liberated areas claimed by the Communists and prevent the Communists from extending territory under their influence.

They must hunt for communist diehards, seek out and fight guerrilla bands, combat saboteurs and protect rural development work.

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POLITICALLY, THE GOVERNment should tell the people what it is doing. The regular propaganda about Communism being bad is useless. There has to be positive propaganda. The Government has under its control radio and television systems. It is possible now that the television system has been extended to all parts of the country for the Government to set up a public television set in every major district and village to inform the people of things being done for them. The TV pictures will make a much greater impression than mere words.

Of course, the television programs have to be professionally made, they must be interesting and stimulating, not dull documentaries.

The propaganda should be made to fit the conditions of each individual areas "Scratch where it itches"—this is the advice of communist leader "Son" to his comrades.

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT IS BEcoming more and more important as the Communists stress in their propaganda about the great gap between the rich and the poor in this country and base their rationale for revolution on this premise.

Efforts have also to be made to protect farmers from profiteering middlemen.

When the Government makes a promise about any project it must carry it out because the credibility of the Government is at stake.

For all these the Government must make special budgetary allocations.

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THE FARMERS OF THE NORTHeast are today doubtful about the benefits to themselves of the big dams built in various provinces. They see the beautiful dams, marvels of engineering, the placid expanse of water in the reservoirs, they see amateur fishermen, sailors, even skiers, indulging their favourite pastimes, they see the people from Bangkok and visitors from abroad coming to gape and admire.

They see the huge pylons and the high tension wires all leading to Bangkok—to supply the city with electricity.

They don't know what they are getting out of the dams. Some of them have given up their land for the building of the reservoirs, they have suffered hardships in resettlement.

The dams have been completed—yet they are not getting any of the water for their farms.

The Government must speed up the construction of canals to direct the water from the reservoirs to the farms.

If the regular departments concerned are so slow about doing the job, perhaps, it could be done like an ARD operation, with the governor given the responsibility and authority to use whatever funds are made available, to quickly build the canals in the places where they are most needed. The work could be parcelled out to contractors with the technical know-how.

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CO-OPERATION OF THE PEOPLE must be obtained because without it we cannot know who the terrorists are, where they are, who their leaders are and what they are up to. The Government must try to pinpoint the principals in the various movements set up by the Communists for farmers, youth and women.

It must improve its intelligence because intelligence can make the difference between victory and defeat.

It must smooth out the rivalries between the services in the gathering of intelligence. All intelligence by any service should be made available to the other services so that an accurate assessment of the situation can be made.

The Government may even have to pay for intelligence. Without a Parliament to bother it, the NEC can make proper use of so-called "secret funds" without divulging to the public what has been done with the money. However, the Government has to keep accounts to prevent future allegations.

Certainly, more funds are needed for the Special Branch of the Police Department.

The Special Branch needs more men and equipment to carry out its task of identifying and unearthing the leaders of the Communist Party of Thailand, particularly the members of the politburo. Such work has to be carried out not only in the rural areas but also in the cities, including Bangkok.

Of course, the Government must avoid a "witch hunt" because a man who is not a Communist but is branded one would be forced to become one. This is where efficient intelligence comes in.

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The authorities have just distributed to them mango and coconut seedlings for planting.

Two wells have been successfully dug.

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"The jungle belongs to the nation and nobody in particular has planted those trees. You can go in and help yourselves."

The Communists are also using this argument with the villagers

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MAO TSE-TUNG'S STRATEGY for "people's wars" calls for the "jungle to surround the village, the villages to surround the town and the towns to surround the city."

He has used this strategy successfully in China.

The communist terrorists of Thailand are trying to carry out the same strategy in the Northeast.

In some areas they have managed to achieve the first stage of the strategy. From the jungles the armed guerrillas, with the support of agents and sympathisers, have managed to extend control over villages.

In his campaign against the Communists, Governor Vichien Srimanitara of Ubon Ratchathani is using reverse strategy.

"I'm trying to get the town to surround the villages and the villages to surround the jungle."

He has put this idea into operation in Sub-Amphoe Nam Yuen, 12 kilometres from the Cambodian border. It was a densely forested area and the Communists have used it as a sanctuary and base for operations to various parts of Ubon.

On the opposite side, within Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge in alliance with the Viet Cong are dominant. Efforts have been made by the Cambodian Communists to subvert the Cambodian-speaking Thais in the frontier villages.

Police Major General Vichien conceived a plan whereby he would bring together the inhabitants of scattered villages into a new settlement.

The settlement would be divided up into lots to be alloted to the various families for farming. There would be marketing, educational, medical and other facilities.

The settlement would be protected by volunteers under command of soldiers and policemen.

The purpose is to keep the people in the area from contamination by communist propaganda and indoctrination, to protect them from attacks by the Communists and also to deny the Communists in the jungle supplies and information which they would require for their survival and effectiveness.

In this way the governor intends to isolate the armed terrorists from the people. In other words, he is cutting off the "water" from the "fish". Guerrillas depend on the people "like fish on water".

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GENERAL VICHIEN OBTAINED permission of the Forestry Department to clear the jungle for the settlement. An area extending over six kilometres was set aside for the settlement. Trees were felled by bulldozers and timber was used for the building of houses for the settlement. The first group of 20 wooden houses was built on stilts.

Families flocked in on the settlement. They were allowed to build houses on the same model as the ones already built. Permission was given them to use timber in the forest for this purpose.

The authorities sold the settlers zinc sheets and other construction materials at a low cost. They had obtained these in bulk from factories under special price arrangements. The settlement with 1,000 houses now is well-laid out with roads and wells.

The settlement officials have requested the Americans at Ubon base for an old generator which is now used to supply power for the settlement.

The teenagers of the settlement have been organised into youth group for community service and for training in occupations like dressmaking and pastimes like folk dancing.

This is a counterpart to the youth movement the Communists have set up in villages as "front" organisations to help them in their activities.

The settlement is protected by a group of volunteers under the command of a young officer who is a veteran of battles with guerrillas both inside and outside Thailand. Navarat Bonrarob, 36, from Khon Kaen, is a graduate of political science from the Chulalongkorn University. He volunteered for military service.

Recently married to a girl in the village, he personally leads patrols in the vicinity on the look-out for guerrillas. He has set up a security system for protection of the settlement.

The settlers plant maize, vegetables, jute, other secondary crops and Mulberry trees for a silk industry.

The authorities have just distributed to them mango and coconut seedlings for planting.

Two wells have been successfully dug.

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GOVERNOR VICHIEN IS TRYING to set up a similar settlement at Na Chaluey, 30 kilometres from the Nam Yuen settlement. However, he has faced opposition from the Ministry of Agriculture.

One agricultural official said: "Does this mean that wherever there are Communists we have to destroy the forest? Can anyone guarantee that if the forests are destroyed and settlements set up, there would be no Communists in that place?

An important debate took place on this very crucial question.

Governor Vichien won his battle for the use of land lying within two kilometres on each side of the 65-kilometre highway between Puntarik and Na Chaluey.

The total area for the new settlement is 200,000 rai. Beyond the settlements on both sides of the road, virgin forests will be maintained, hopefully with the aid of the settlers.

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THE PROBLEM OF CONSERVATION and Communism has become a serious one.

Conservationists would like to keep the forests unspoiled because they are a most valuable natural resource which prevents erosion and facilitates agriculture. Without forests, Thailand would become a desert.

However, the fact must be taken into consideration that a large number of forests have already been denuded by timber traders, sawmillers and "slash-and-burn" farmers. These farmers move from one forest to another, after exhausting the fertility of the land at each place. There are wide tracts of such land.

The conservation question is very much tied up with land disputes.

People in the Northeast as well as other places would like to have farm land of their own. This matter is considered so close to the minds and stomachs of the people that it has political connotations.

In election campaigns, politicians had exploited this problem by promising that if they were elected they would make sure that the people could go into the forests and cut down trees to build their own houses or for farming purposes.

"The jungle belongs to the nation and nobody in particular has planted those trees. You can go in and help yourselves."

The Communists are also using this argument with the villagers

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whom they are trying to alienate from the Government.

The Government cannot allow the country to be denuded of forests. It has a duty to future generations to conserve them.

However, it has to recognise the need of the people for land.

Probably, it could open up denuded areas for families needing land. Probably, the settlers could grow fruit trees and other plants which can serve the same purposes as forest trees.

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AN IMPORTANT POINT IS, THE Government should not allow local authorities to persecute people who have gone into the already denuded forests to do farming. If the denuded areas are needed for reaforestation, those families should be resettled at another place.

The uses of forests should also be carefully explained to the people so that they understand the necessity of maintaining them in their natural state.

Governor Vichien told me this story:

"There was a collision between a samlor and a car in my province. The police sided with the rich Chinese merchant who owns the car.

"As a result, the poor samlor man has to pay for repairs to his own vehicle and for his own medical expenses."

He stressed to the Police Superintendent that his men should be guided by three principles—the law, justice and humanity.

These are important guidelines for officials in their relations with the people.

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HOW ARE ORDERS FROM BANGkok being implemented or executed? Are they implemented or executed?

The Government should make sure that all orders are carried out. Chief instruments for carrying out the orders are the Department of Local Administration and the Police Department.

The Government cannot afford to allow its orders to be merely "paper orders".

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THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT afford to be represented by poor governors in the provinces. It should transfer men who do not achieve results within definite periods, say, two years—no matter how well-connected they may be.

Officials who do well should be encouraged and given due recognition.

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IN OUR BATTLE WITH THE Communists, we will have to depend more and more upon our own budgetary resources as the United States phases out its aid.

We cannot depend too much on outside monetary assistance. We may have to collect more taxes from those who can afford to pay them.

Money is needed by the Government for projects in the security field and development field. Projects in these two fields must go hand in hand if counter insurgency is to be effective.

A CERTAIN HIGH-RANKING PRovincial official told me that during a visit to Laos, Laotian officials whispered to him that they would like the situation in their country to "continue as it is".

Astounded, he asked: "Why?"

One of them replied: "As long as the situation goes on like this the United States will keep up its aid for us. There's no need for us to do anything decisive about the Communists." Those Laotian officials are deceiving themselves.

The Thai official added that he believed this was not the case with Thailand.

Self-reliance is the watchword.

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WITH THE UNITED STATES AIR Force increasing its strength here and intensifying its bombing of North Vietnam, steps have to be taken to guard against sapper attacks, commando raids and sabotage against the bases in the Northeast.

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OFFICIALS ASSIGNED TO THE rural areas must not consider their assignments to be limited to official civil service hours.

The Communists work at all hours and on holidays. They may well plan attacks and activities while officials are away from their posts or are on holiday especially during the weekends. I have found some conscientious officials actively at work at all hours every day of the week but there are others who simply would like to spend long weekends in Bangkok.

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THROUGHOUT THE NORTHeast I found that the people needed protection. If a village is not protected by a government force the terrorists step in and take over control of it. The importance of Government presence cannot be overemphasized."

If a villager is to resist communist efforts to recruit him, he must be assured that he is protected.

The villager will give his loyalty, grudgingly or ungrudgingly, to those he feels has effective control over him.

No matter how much the Government may invest in economic development of the village, no matter if the Government has built a well or a road for the village, no matter if the Government has a good educational program for the youth of the village, no matter whether the Government permits or prohibits a representative form of administration, it would lose the inhabitants to the Communists if the Communists are more in evidence than government officials.

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THE PEOPLE MUST BE GIVEN better medical facilities.

One of the ways in which the Communist agents subvert villagers is by providing the sick with medicines.

The reorganisation of the Ministry of Public Health taken by the National Executive Council may be the first step in the right direction to ensure better medical attention for the rural populace.

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The hilltribes of the North are a different problem from the Northeastern Communists, although some of the hilltribes are under the direction of leaders from the Northeast, as mentioned in an earlier article in this series.

They have nothing much to look forward to at present, and the Government may be wise to consider proper citizenship, with rights and responsibilities, for those among them who are peace-loving and law-abiding.

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THIS IS A CRITICAL TIME FOR Thailand.

There has to be greater co-operation not only between government and people but also among the various ministries and departments of government in the security and development fields.

The village official is naturally more interested in his own personal welfare or the interest of his own department. He has to be made to realise the significance of his duty for the survival of the nation.

Top leaders have to set examples to be followed all along the line down to the officials in direct contact with the people.

Let us all do what we can to ensure that our poor brethren in the rural areas have a decent life. There is still time to prevent Thailand going the way of Vietnam.

The National Executive Council is in a position to make the necessary decisions and to use all necessary resources to carry out the decisions.

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