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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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A-208 — CONFIDENTIAL/NOFORN — 1 — HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

INFO: BRUSSELS, LUXEMBOURG, THE HAGUE, USUN, USEC

RECEIVED
APR 13 2

FROM : Amembassy BANGKOK

DATE: APRIL 9, 1970

SUBJECT : Sompong Sucharitkul Appointed Ambassador to Benelux Countries

REF :

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has announced the appointment of Dr. Sompong Sucharitkul as Ambassador to the Benelux countries, resident at The Hague, and he is expected to arrive at his post during April. As one of his principal duties, Dr. Sompong plans to study the Common Market with a view to expanding Thai exports.

This will represent the first appointment abroad for one of the most brilliant of Thailand's new-generation diplomats and is clearly designed to provide representational seasoning for him after a career wholly concentrated in the Ministry (though with extensive international conference experience). He has been earmarked for a foreign post for more than two years, and USUN (where he is known from membership in past UNGA delegations) will be relieved that despite well grounded rumors he has now been assigned elsewhere -- the reason for the switch reportedly being that Foreign Minister Thanat desires to keep Ambassador Anand Panyarachun in New York while there remains any possibility that the UN may become involved in a Vietnam settlement.

Sompong goes to The Hague after some two years as Director General of the Economic Department in the Ministry. His preceding assignments were as Secretary to the Foreign Minister (Thanat) and Director of the SEATO Division, and through them he developed a close and apparently effective relationship with Thanat. Although no one makes policy for Thanat, Sompong is probably one of the most weighty subordinate (some would say mischievous) influences upon him. He has acted in his current assignment as though he had greater freedom for decision than any other Director General, and at the same time has been able to

GROUP 3
Downgraded at 12-year intervals, not automatically declassified.

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ances: CON:KBekker; DCM:NBHannah

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insert himself (or has been asked by Thanat to do so) into a number of matters outside his nominal field of responsibility.

Both his hosts and diplomatic colleagues will find Sompong, who is well known to this Embassy, alternately engaging and difficult. He and his capable wife, Taitow, can be socially charming, with wide-ranging interests and at home in a European cultural environment. Professionally, Sompong is quick and highly intelligent, a vigorous negotiator capable both of cogent argument and deliberate abrasion and irascibility. He is intolerant of mediocrity wherever he thinks he sees it, among foreigners or his own people, and as a result is respected in circles where he is not popular.

Dr. Sompong is highly nationalistic. Without attempting any clinical analysis, weare inclined to attribute the excesses to which this impulse sometimes carries him to a) his extensive foreign education, which sets him wide apart from most of his society in outlook as well as ability, and b) his partly Chinese extraction. He thus has two good reasons to demonstrate constantly to his peers, and indeed to himself, that he is a "good Thai". We understand that Sompong's Chinese forebear, already married into the Thai community, was one of the first Chinese to be taken directly into the service of the Thai Court. The family has now been prominent in government service through several generations. An uncle, Chitti Suchanitkul, reached the highest career position in the Foreign Ministry, Under Secretary, and was recalled from retirement to join the March 1969 Thanom government as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Dr. Sompong has demonstrated his assertiveness over the past few months when, in the process of clearing his "In Box," he has had a large if not dominant role in:

a) making unduly difficult the negotiation of an amendment to the route annex of the Thai-U.S. air bilateral, to which he succeeded in adding unnecessary heat by artificial insertion of unrelated matters concerning traffic restrictions on established routes;

b) the sudden abrogation by the RTG of existing friendship and commercial treaties with some 17 nations (A-129 of March 5 to Department), which will leave his successor with a full year's work; Sompong may reap some of his own harvest, however, as the countries facing renegotiation include the three to which he will be accredited;

c) obfuscating a small U.S.-Thai problem involving duty-free importation of components of reconstituted milk for use by our military forces, on

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OF UNDER SECRETARY'S TALK WITH DEPUTY
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WITHOUT THE AUTHORIZATION OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

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