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ORIGIN/ACTION

RM/R 1	REP	AF
ARA	EUR	FE
NEA	CU	INR 6
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L	FBO	AID 1
	SCT 6	PM 2
AGR	COM	FRB
INT	LAB	TAR
TR	XMB	AIR 5
ARMY 3	CIA 16	NAVY 5
OSD 3	USIA 10	NSA 3
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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TO : AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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FROM : American Consulate Chiang Mai

DATE: April 30, 1971

SUBJECT : Events in North Thailand, January-March 1971

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2. Doctors' Strike at Chiang Mai University Hospital

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Contents and Classification Approved by: Weaver Gim

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A. Political Events

1. Insurgency in the North

During the January through March reporting period, the tempo and scale of armed activity by both the government and insurgent forces, but more particularly the latter, increased markedly over that of the previous quarter. In eastern Chiang Rai province some seven hundred Chinese Irregular Forces (CIF) personnel, who in December had scored notable successes in seizing several insurgent mountain strongholds and supply stockpiles (see A-1) were tied down to the defense of these occupied strong points against persistent insurgent harassment. Provincial officials credited the CIF units with having dislocated the insurgents sufficiently to keep them from being more active elsewhere in the province. They cited numerous low level reports indicating that insurgents were concentrating in the Chiang Rai-Lao border area in order to bolster defenses against possible further CIF/Royal Thai Government moves.

In the mountainous Doi Pa Chi (PB 6003) area of southeastern Chiang Rai and Nan a several company sized RTA air-supported operation against a suspected major insurgent base was conducted February 15-24. It resulted in the discovery and destruction of five small to medium sized camps but no major insurgent base was located. Insurgent resistance resulted in 5 RTG KIA and 29 WIA plus the downing of two helicopters and the damaging of several others. The RTA estimated that the insurgents suffered from 20 to 25 casualties.

In March two insurgent attacks in Northeastern Nan province underscored recent improvements in insurgent capabilities. In a series of engagements from March 11 through 15, an RTA platoon and a Border Patrol Police platoon deployed near Baa Yaa and Ban Dan respectively (approximately QB 2943) were attacked by an estimated force of about 100 insurgents. During these engagements (in which insurgents were believed to have employed a 60 mm mortar) the RTA platoon was scattered. RTG losses totalled 10 KIA and 11 WIA while insurgent losses were unknown. This was followed by an insurgent ambush on March 29 of a RTA Highway Department road construction convoy near Ban Pon (QB 0560) where the RTG is undertaking the construction of a service track road to link this remote and mountainous area of Northeast Nan to a major road trunk. In the ambush, conducted by a force estimated at about 100 insurgents, one armored personnel carrier (APC) was destroyed by an insurgent PG-2 (B-40) grenade launcher round. RTG losses in this ambush were 12 KIA and 11 WIA. The size of these insurgent groups and these first confirmed incidents involving insurgent use of crew served weapons in Thailand, combined with persistent speculation and low level reports of the presence of large Pathet Lao and/or North Vietnamese forces

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in the adjoining Laotian border area of Sayaboury, have considerably heightened RTG concern over the deterioration of security in the Northern borders.

Meanwhile in the tri-province area of Pitsanuloke-Loei-Petchabun to the south the RTG continued medium and small scale suppression operations against insurgent bands both in the mountains and in adjoining lowland areas. That the insurgents have had some success in penetrating lowland Thai villages was evidenced when some 12 Thai families left two villages in Nakorn Thai district of Pitsanuloke province to join the insurgents in the surrounding mountain forests. Authorities believe these families fled because they feared government punishment for their having traded food and supplies with the insurgents. RTG psychological warfare operations to win them back are underway. In Tak province to the west, road construction progress on the Umphang-Mae Sod road has been slow as heavy-handed police operations against suspected insurgent groups have alienated a number of Karen and Meo villagers. Continued persistent insurgent sniping and ambush attempts have disrupted the work of road crews and security escorts, and police clearing operations have netted disappointingly few positive results.

2. Doctors' Strike at Chiang Mai University Hospital.

A minor altercation, compounded by misunderstanding, considerations of "face", underlying hostilities, and administrative ineptness, led to a strike by all 35 interns and 18 of 22 resident doctors at Chiang Mai University Hospital April 21-26.

The proximate cause of the trouble was an incident last December in which an intern, Dr. Kovit Inthasiroart, slapped a nurce because of the loss of a document. Dr. Kovit later apologized, and the nurse involved seemed satisfied; but a group of her colleagues, led by seven senior nurses, sent protest letters to the Medical Council in Bangkok and to the University Rector. Then in March, Dr. Kovit completed his internship and was hired as a resident. This touched off still greater protests from the nurses: 131 of a total 300 submitted their resignations, effective May 1, if Dr. Kovit were not fired. Dr. Kovit offered to resign, and Dr. Rabiab Reukkasem, Director of the Hospital and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, took him to Bangkok and arranged another job for him there. On Dean Rabiab's return, however, the 35 interns and 18 residents confronted him with a demand that Dr. Kovit be reinstated and the seven leaders of the nurses' group be fired. The problem was further compounded by a doctor's satirical article in the Medical School paper which the

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nurses took as an insult; and a widespread poster campaign by the nurses ensued. By this time, it had become a matter of principle and 'face'. The nurses protested that the doctors were habitually harsh and rude, and the doctors protested that the nurses were unreasonable and should not have influence over doctors' assignments.

Finally, on April 20, the doctors gave Dean Rabiab a six-hour ultimatum to act on their demands. The dean's response was the formation of a committee to investigate the matter, and the doctors, demanding immediate action, walked off the job the following day. Senior doctors, who were mostly in sympathy with their young colleagues, took over the work load, and hospital operations were not seriously affected. According to an American doctor closely associated with the hospital, as the strike continued Dean Rabiab only succeeded in arousing further hostility on both sides.

Then Came Boonsom. On April 24, Dr. Boonsom Martin came to Chiang Mai in his capacity as Chairman of the Medical Council. (He is also Director General of the Physical Education Department, former Dean of the Chiang Mai Medical Faculty, and reportedly the Prime Minister's nominee to replace Dr. Buares Kamthong as Rector of the University.) According to Dr. Benjaphan Na-Chiangmai, Deputy Director of the Hospital, it was Dr. Boonsom's intervention which resolved the strike. He promised that a committee to investigate the problem would be formed under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office, in addition to the local Chiang Mai University committee. By April 27, all of the striking doctors were back at work.

The basic problems, however, remain unresolved. The doctors' demands have not been met, and moreover, they are under threat of withholding their diplomas and professional licenses. The nurses are as unhappy as ever over their alledged mistreatment by the doctors. And Dean Rabiab, by his handling of the problem, has reportedly lost prestige and will probably have more trouble than ever in administering the hospital effectively.

COMMENT:

The Chiang Mai University Medical Faculty has high academic standards, and its graduates have consistently placed at or near the top in national examinations. This incident, however, reflects some of the problems, particularly in administrative matters, which are increasingly starting to appear. For example, one of the nurses' unexpressed but underlying grievances is low pay, an average of about 1000 baht per month. This is the principal reason, according to Associate Dean Dr. Arvudh Srisukii, that there are almost as many Thai nurses in Chicago

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as there are at Chiang Mai University Hospital.

An even more pressing problem according to Dr. Kosin Amayatakul of the Medical School staff is the lack of adequate hospital budget. Kosin said the hospital, because of unrealistically limited annual budgets, has incurred sizeable debts to a number of creditors. Electricity bills owed cumulatively over six or seven years alone amount to some five million baht ($US 250,000). Since the Yanhee Electrical Authority is also owned and operated by the RTG, these debit accounts presumably could be straightened out through in-house accounting procedures. However, the hospital reportedly also owes considerable sums for supplies and services that have been provided over long periods by private commercial firms. This has sometimes resulted in the termination of credit to the hospital by these firms and consequent patchwork budget juggling. These financial tangles reportedly are largely the result of unrealistically small central government budget appropriations, even though authorities are well aware that income from patients never covers more than a fraction of actual hospital costs. According to Dr. Arvudh the termination last August of the AID supported University of Illinois technical assistance program with the Chiang Mai Medical School has been definitely felt by the Medical School and Hospital, as it brought an end to a major source of US material support and technical assistance and consequently shortfalls in supplies and technical services have resulted.

The community reaction to the strike and its widespread reporting in the local press seems to be shock that the doctors and nurses can't get along and disappointment that such a fine institution and source of local pride could be so torn apart.

B. Economic Activities:

1. Tourist Boom Continues.

Chiang Mai's tourist boom continues to be a bright spot in the Northern economy. Complete 1970 figures are not available (nor are comparative figures for earlier years), but the TOT office reports that they will show a continuing increase in the number of visitors to Chiang Mai. July-November figures show an average of 8666 visitors per month staying in hotels, of which an average of 3195 were foreigners. 1971 has also begun strong. During the April Songkran festival, for example, all of the city's 1153 first and second class hotel rooms were full, and well over 1000 visitors were staying in local wats.

Tourist facilities also continue to grow apace. The airport terminal expansion has been completed, to better serve the six flights per day from Bangkok; and hopes are still strong that international service will begin soon. The number of hotel rooms is up by about 20% in the past year, and a new five-story hotel is due to open soon. The city's second Disneyland-type entertainment facility, the "Old Chiang Mai

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Cultural Center" complete with hilltribe "courting and wooing" on display every night, opened early this year. It is owned by the prominent and wealthy Nimmanahaeminda family.

2. Reaction to Rice Price Slump.

The national concern about falling rice prices is widely shared in the North, particularly in Chiangrai, which is traditionally one of the most important rice-growing provinces in the country. There has been a limited amount of very sharp criticism of U.S. PL-480 sales in this regard, notably in Chiang Mai's only daily newspaper, Thin Nua-Phim Thai (see Chiang Mai telegram 029).

However, the recent proposal of a group of mainly Central MP's to organize anti-American and anti-Japanese demonstrations over the rice issue throughout the country, has not gained significant support in the North. In visits to major Northern rice-growing provinces such as Chiangrai, Sukhothai, and Pitsanuloke, Consulate officers found that most local leaders understand that the problem is very complex. Moreover, they recognize the strong element of demogoguery in attempts to lay the blame mostly on PL-480. The RTG usually receives a great deal of criticism for not doing more to develop markets for Thai rice, and there seems to be widespread agreement locally that the export premium should be abolished.

C. Other

1. Space Track Radar Station at Kho Kha, Lampang Provice.

Construction is progressing according to schedule on a U.S. space track radar station at Kho Kha district, Lampang Province. The station, which is to be partly operational by July 1, and fully completed by mid-1972, will be manned by approximately 200 USAF personnel plus 40-50 US civilian contract employees. The station will serve both security and scientific purposes.

The station, which is designed to be a self-contained unit, will have quarters for all its personnel plus recreation and entertainment facilities. Completion of the power generating house is expected by mid-May and quarters for enlisted men by September 1, 1971.

Advance parties will begin arriving on May 9 (with temporary housing in Lampang hotels) and will commence operation on July 1. By mid-October the station should be up to full strength, with all personnel living on the site.

Consulate officers on April 21 briefed the Governor and other officials of Lampang about the radar station. Heretofore, press speculation and

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rumors suggested that the US was building an air base at Kho Kha. The Lampang officials were grateful for the briefing and had questions principally about the local benefits of the station (i.e. jobs) and about the impact of the station on the nearby city of Lampang. Consulate officers assured them that every effort would be made to promote good relations between local people and U.S. personnel at the site, and that Consulate officers would be available to assist with any problems.

COMMENT:

Although small compared to U.S. installations elsewhere in Thailand, this will be the largest concentration of U.S. military personnel in the North.

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