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TO : Amembassy BANGKOK
INFO : Amembassy KUALA LUMPUR
Amconsul CHIANG MAI
Amconsul UDORN
Department of State
CINCPAC

FROM : Amconsul SONGKHLA

SUBJECT : Situation in Yala Province

REF :

Summary: The CPM in Yala are reported to be still somewhat disorganized after the loss of three major camps in April and May. Banditry continues at a high rate; development activities are moving slowly. An encouraging young district officer has been assigned to Betong. END SUMMARY

Introduction: Yala province on the Malaysian border is the heart of the operational area of the Malayan National Liberation Army (also called the communist terrorist organization - the CPM). The CPM is most active in the districts of Betong, Bannang Sata, and Yaha. Yala province borders the provinces of Songkhla, Pattani, and Narathiwat on the west, north, and east; the province is quite mountainous with peaks rising to over 3,000 feet; rubber dominates the economy though there are a few tin mines. The following report is based on observations and conversations during a two day visit to the provincial seat, Betong, and Bannang Sata on August 26 and 27. END INTRODUCTION

1. In Betong the 12th Regiment of the CPM is reported to be still suffering the aftereffects of the loss of three major camps in April and May. Officials report an increase in collection of supplies, perhaps to compensate for some lost with the camps; the CPM continue to avoid Thai and Malaysian police patrols in Betong although officials claim an increase in the number of booby traps planted in the jungle by the insurgents.

2. In Bannang Sata district (which is in the 12th Regiment area) and Yaha district the CPM are reported to have increased propaganda and recruiting among the ethnic Malay Thai Muslims; local officials [redacted] give little information on CPM incursions into Malaysia other than that they are taking place, usually with only small groups of 5 to 10, but once with a group numbering 40.

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GROUP 3

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3. Banditry and extortion were reported to be more serious in all districts except Betong, in that district the well established CTO extortion mechanism apparently tolerates no interference by independent bandits and thugs. Poor rubber prices are probably contributing to the rise in crime.

4. The 60,000 acre Sai Kaip land settlement in Bannang Sata district now has a population of over 10,000. Ninety per cent of the settlers are Thai Buddhists from outside the area. Contacts between the settlers and the indigenous Thai Muslims are few. The settlers, who began arriving five years ago, are not yet getting more than a subsistence living out of the mountainous terrain. Officials of the land settlement assert that they have cut over 200 kilometers of dry weather road to open up the settlement area; they are now working on a through connection to Waeng district of Narathiwat.

5. The Mobile Development Unit (MDU) in Betong seems to be moving at a leisurely pace after two years in the present site 10 kilometers east of Betong city adjacent to the airfield. Deadline rates on equipment are expected to be high. The MDU is located within sight of a Border Patrol Police (BPP) post which operates a school and clinic, two functions usually undertaken by a MDU. This seems to be an unnecessary concentration of development and security resources in one place. Prior to moving to Betong 2 years ago, the MDU spent 4 years in Ban Lalae, Yaha district.

6. Betong has a new and young district officer, a graduate of the Nai Amphoe (District Officer) Academy. He has also studied in the US. His previous assignment was as district officer in Huai Yot district of Trang province where he turned in a solid performance. The Betong post fits in with the pattern elsewhere of assigning bright, young district officers to the border provinces. It should be noted that the post of district officer in Betong traditionally been regarded as one of the most lucrative government jobs in South Thailand, with its opportunities for cross border smuggling. As such it has usually been sought after by older less dedicated officers with influence in Bangkok. The break in this pattern is an encouraging sign.

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