Enclosure No. 1 to despatch no. 738 dated July 24,1940, from the American Legation, at Bangkok, Thailand, on the subject "Prime Minister's Press Conference on the 18,40.

Source: Bangkok Times
July 18, 1940

THE PREMIER'S INTERVIEW

MANY MATTERS DISCUSSED.

JUL 18 1940

H. E. the Premier, Major-General Luang Pibulasonggram, discussed many matters of general interest at the conference with local newspaper representatives which was held at Suan Kulap Palace yesterday afternoon. His Excellency regretted that, owing to illness, he had been compelled to postpone that conference on two previous occasions, but was now feeling well again and was glad to welcome those present. He asked them to convey through the medium of their newspapers an expression of his thanks to all those who had tendered to him birthday greetings and presents on his birthday on Sunday last. He was grateful to everybody, and would remember the many kindnesses which had been done to him.

ARMY MANŒUVRES.

The Premier expressed doubt whether the army manœuvres, as proposed by him, could be held, because the main question was one of finance, and he did not know if it was possible to make a budget allotment for this purpose. He intended, however, to appeal to reservists to volunteer for service, in order to train the new recruits who were to be stationed in the southern provinces.

He would like, in his capacity as Premier, as Minister of Defence, and as Minister of Foreign Affairs, to re-emphasize what he had so often repeated that Thailand had no intention of being involved in the war either now or in the immediate future. He had heard rumours that people living in the north-eastern provinces, in Nakhon Ratchasima, and in the southern section—Phetchaburi—were withdrawing their savings through nervousness. He wished to assure these people that there was no necessity for such nervousness, as Thailand had no intention of breaking away from her neutrality.

It might be possible, continued the Premier, that these people had become alarmed owing to the movement of the military, which was primarily for defensive purposes and also for the purpose of keeping a check on refugees from the border areas.

"We have sent a battalion of infantry and a small cavalry unit to Aran Prathet in order to check immigration from Indochina. We have also sent similar units from Roi-Et and Nakhon Ratchasima to Ubon, which is also on the border, and is thus a means of ingress for immigrants. In other areas along the border where there were no military units, the police force had been reinforced.

"It was only natural, with Indochina's mother country, France, being in the position she is at present, that the people of Indochina should be agitated, and it is also natural that we on this side of the border should take steps to prevent any incidents from breaking out on our side of the border. If no incidents occur and the position on the frontier becomes tranquil, our troops will be withdrawn. As a matter of fact, we have already withdrawn a certain part of our troops from the Aran Prathet border, since no incidents have occurred in that area."

THE "SUKHOTHAI" INCIDENT.

Turning to the rumours about the incident concerning the *Sukhothai*, a Thai gunboat, in Singapore harbour, the Premier said he would like to explain the facts as they had come to his possession. A *communiqué* would also be issued by the Publicity Department on the subject. The facts were that, one or two days before Italy entered the war, two or three Italian merchant ships entered Phuket harbour.

As soon as the Italian declaration of war was known, the Thai Government, in order strictly to observe its neutrality, sent three Air Force planes to Phuket for the purpose of seeing that Thailand's neutrality was in no way breached and to carry out whatever was necessary to maintain that neutrality. The gunboat *Sukhothai* was despatched subsequently from Bangkog to relieve the Air Force of the duty entrusted to them.

The *Sukhothai* had to pass Singapore and, to get the usual information in such cases a warning shot was fired, —this being a customary naval duty— in order to make the *Sukhothai* stop. This, the *Sukhothai* immediately did and the naval authorities in Singapore boarded the vessel and as soon as the identity of the gunboat was established the officers and crew were warmly welcomed ashore and were given a very excellent reception.

GERMAN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES.

Dealing with German occupied territories the Premier said the question of the status of such countries would not be considered by Thailand so long as the war continued. Germany herself was not in a position to decide what she would do in regard to these countries. The Thai Legation in Berlin had been told by the German Foreign Office to withdraw the Thai Legations in Norway, Holland and Belgium, a similar intimation being also given to other countries represented in those areas. As no Thai Legations had been established in those countries the question of withdrawal did not affect Thailand.

The Premier went on to say that as far as Thailand was concerned the Ministers representing the countries now under German occupation were continued to be regarded as they had hitherto been by the Thai Government.

THE CASE OF MR. BURNAY.

Questions were asked by newspaper representatives concerning the Government's intentions in regard to Mr. J. Burnay, and the Premier replied that the Government was considering the question of asking Mr. Burnay voluntarily to leave Thailand. If he did not act on that suggestion the Government would be forced to deport him. Mr. Burnay had been in receipt of a monthly salary of Tcs. 1,800 from the Government before his contract was terminated. He would be deprived of his lump sum gratuity which amounted to about Tcs. 30,000.

THE TRANSITORY PERIOD.

After mentioning that the new budget would pay particular attention to the second phase of the road construction programme, and also that Government contemplated developing the natural resources of the country, particularly mining and the cultivation of rubber, the Premier went on to deal with the question of the transitory period in connection with the present Constitution. He pointed out that the Government had so far not considered the matter.

A meeting was held on Tuesday by the second category members of the National Assembly to choose a successor to Phra Sarasat Prapban, who had resigned. The Premier as head of this group was also present and an informal discussion took place about the formation of political parties.

The Premier stated that he had explained to the meeting how political parties were formed, and operated in foreign countries, and he then gave the members the draft of a Bill dealing with the formation of political parties, which would be presented to the Assembly shortly, so that they could study the problem and form their own opinions which would be of great help when the Bill was being discussed.

The Premier explained that the question of the transitory period had been raised merely for informative purposes. He himself had an open mind on the subject and was quite content to abide by the decision of the Assembly whether the transitory period should be extended or not.

THE GENEVA LEAGUE.

"Thailand intends to remain a member of the League of Nations," said the Premier. "Our subscription amounts to about Tcs. 100,000 and this we have paid punctually each year although up to the present moment we have gained little or no benefit from membership of the League."

Asked why membership should be continued if no benefits were derived, the Premier said that Thailand intended to honour its promise given when the League was formed after the Great War. Thailand had then become a member and would continue its membership. Apart from that fact when the Constitution was drawn up the membership of Thailand in the Geneva League was confirmed. The Premier laughingly added that the present subscription had not been transmitted to Geneva owing to difficulties of communicating with the League officials.

WARSHIPS BUILT IN ITALY.

The Premier mentioned that no news had been received as yet about the two warships which were being built for Thailand's Navy in Italy. He, however, was of the opinion that the construction would continue and that those warships would not be used by Italy for its own purpose, firstly because they would not be ready in time for such use, and secondly because such warships were different from the naval units used by Italy.

Finally the Premier stated that the new Press Act was being considered by the Judicial Council, but that it is expected it would be presented to the present session of the Assembly for consideration.

The conference which started at 2.30 p. m. ended at 4.45 p. m.

...ok, Thailand, on the
...nference on July 16,40

Source: Bangkok Chronicle
July 16, 1940

...er At Press Conference
...sses Many Vital Topics
...l Policies Clarified

...portance were
...th conference
...oon from 6.30
...Ruleb Palace,
...representatives of
...present at the

...hich was brought
...e that the Ministry
...ontemplating a
...the reserve troops
...this, instead of me-
...rards April next
Premier denied the
...g to foundation at
...hat at present the
...ons were not yet
...mobilization next
...were studying the
...of the project.

...for the South

...the possibility of en-
...among the reserve
...with a view to sending
...Lavacha in Bang-
Premier. The troops in
...to aid to garrisons
...position at the seven
...ports and this the
...City will be reinforce-
...ments until the be-
...when new recruits
...to replace them.
...ontemplated
...the southern
...members of police
...detached to
...police force

world affairs, emphasised the Premier. Some troop movements were ordered at Aranya Prades, Ubol and Nagorn Rajsima, and these were ordered after the French capitulation in Europe because the Government was not certain that under present conditions the Government of [illegible] probably lose hold of the centre of French Indo-China. Thus the troops at Aranya Prades were ordered to advance to Tambol Khlongluk, but this advanced unit was already withdrawn to Aranya Prades after it was known that an amicable settlement had been reached between the Thai Government and the Indo-China Government. The Premier concluded by emphasising once again the firm determination of Thailand to remain neutral to the very last moment and referred to the Non-Aggression Pact signed recently between Thailand and France.

H. M. S. Subhadhai.

A reporter then questioned His Excellency about the rumours of the Subhadhai incident, which was widely noised by certain newspapers in Bangkok, and the Premier stated that the incident was not considered to be of any serious character at all and was caused by some small misunderstanding, which was soon clarified.

[illegible]

programme while he could also indicate that the Budget's main policy will be confined to the improvement of transportation facilities with a view to encouraging the country's advance mainly in the economic field. The majority of the projects will be for the construction of highways while the construction of transport systems will also be carried out more vigorously.

Of Industrialising Thailand

The benefit of these transportation facilities was great especially when our country has already started some kinds of light industries, and he hoped that when all the works recently initiated had attained definite progress, the Government will seriously consider the development of heavy industry and the first thing which deserves attention was the mineral wealth of the country. He then recalled his own experience one day when he was visiting Lopburi and saw the labourers using iron ore for earth work on highway construction. He picked up a quantity of the earth and sent it to be analysed and the officials later reported to him that it contained 45 percent iron ore. The people there thought it was ordinary stone, taken off from a cliff.

Political Transition

When asked about his opinion regarding the move to extend the [illegible] period now launched by [illegible] party members, the P[illegible] said he had no idea yet regarding the problem, but he had already asked the second category members to study the problem and the party-political bill closely so that some idea could be formed by them before the discussion of this motion and the Bill in the National Assembly.

There was a meeting of the second category members this week, [illegible] he admitted, but no actual discussion about the extension of the [illegible] took place on the party-political [illegible] bill. The meeting was [illegible] for the selection [illegible] second category members [illegible] Parliament [illegible] Council.