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HANDLING INDICATOR

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TO : Amembassy BANGKOK

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FROM : Amconsul, UDORN

DATE: June 30, 1971

SUBJECT : Northeast Thailand Quarterly Summary, April - June 1971

REF : A-7 NE Thai Quarterly Summary, April 6, 1971

CONTENTS:

1. Lao Coup Attempt
2. Northeast Parliamentarians
3. Vietnamese Refugees
4. Weapons Smuggling
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1. Lao Coup Attempt. Veteran Thai/Lao politician Amphorn Suwannabon used Nongkhai province of the Northeast as his headquarters in a feeble coup attempt in early April against the Souvanna government. Amphorn caught no one by surprise, and the quick conclusion of his activities leads to speculation that they were more a flight of fancy than a well-designed maneuver.

Amphorn never left the Thai side of the river, thereby causing considerable problems for Nongkhai officials. The RTG sent Amphorn on a mission into the Phan mountains in Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom a few years ago, with the hope that he could persuade insurgent leaders to turn themselves in. Since then he has been blessed with a mantle of immunity because local officials never know whether he still has RTG sponsorship. Nongkhai officials were more perplexed than Souvanna in trying to decide how to handle Amphorn and his followers.

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2. Northeast Parliamentarians.
A. Vichai Assassination Attempt. A truckload of unidentified gunmen stopped and shot at the vehicle carrying Ubon MP Vichai Komolvich, his wife, and several supporters on May 2. Vichai was returning from Yasothan district after running successfully in a by-election to fill a province assembly seat. Vichai's wife and driver were killed, and he was seriously wounded by a bullet that entered near his right eye and lodged behind his left. The prognosis is that he will survive, but with impaired vision.

Police soon discounted the motive as political, and attributed the shooting to economic warfare in Ubon. The prime suspect for having sponsored the assassination attempt is Chaisiri Reungkanjavaseth, a wealthy Sino-Thai and confidant of Ubon governor Vichien Simantara. Chaisiri and Vichai were rivals in the lumber trade. The special relationship between Chaisiri and the governor has impeded the police investigation, and may keep Chaisiri from trial. Evidence is mounting, however, and the suspected gunmen and owner of the truck used in the shooting have been arrested. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE.

B. Democratic Party Rally in Udorn. The Big Show came to Udorn April 9, minus elephants but with Ringmaster Seni Pramote. The rally was held to celebrate the opening of the Udorn Democratic Party headquarters, which had already been open for business six months previously. Seni and other party luminaries used the forum to open the 1973 parliamentary campaign in the Northeast by attacking the Thanom-Praphat leadership and the government party.

The rally was also a test of the martial law edict against political rallies. That issue never came to a head, however, as the honorable opposition party was allowed to harangue far into the night without interference from civil, police, or military authorities. CONFIDENTIAL. (Udorn A-9).

C. Travel to the U.S. During the quarter, several Northeast MPs visited the U.S. MPs Lertsin Hongsengthai (Liberal-Khonkaen) and Ying Sitthitham (Social Democrat-Ubon) traveled on an International Visitor grant. MPs Chamnong Srivorakarn (UTPP-Nakhon Phanom), Yot Inthrakomalasut (UTPP-Korat), Somboon Pairin (Democrat-Roi-et) and Wiwat Inudom (UTPP-Udorn) also traveled at the invitation of the U.S. government. The Union Oil Company, which intends to begin exploratory drilling in Khao Wong Sub-district of Kalasin province this fall, sponsored MPs Chanyouth Chaikhamming (Liberal-Kalasin) and Sakan Samsen (Independent-Udorn), among others. UNCLASSIFIED.

3. Vietnamese Refugees. In the wake of the 25 May communique on the suspension of repatriation talks in Bangkok, several Northeast governors leaned heavily on their Vietnamese refugee "guests". Between 50 and 60

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Vietnamese were arrested in Korat May 19, and 54 in Nakhon Phanom May 27. Six refugees from Udorn, who had just returned from a visit to Vientiane in June, were taken into custody by Immigration officials, fined, and sent to Lat Bua Khao jail in Korat.

According to Nakhon Phanom Governor Yong, he acted after receiving a get-tough order from CSOC-Bangkok. Yong was incensed by information he received that North Vietnamese cadre in his province raised more than 11 million baht ($550,000) during April and May to support the war effort.

Treatment of the refugees depends on the attitude of individual governors of the provinces where they reside. CSOC Plan 114, designed to distinguish hard-core cadre from the "good" refugees, and eventually assimilate the latter into Thai society, has gotten a creaky start in the Northeast. The refugees continue in limbo. CONFIDENTIAL (Udorn 83).

4. Weapons Smuggling. Contraband M-16s and other sophisticated weapons continued to flow from Laos into Thailand during the quarter. Prime crossing sites are on the Mekong along the Nakhon Phanom and Ubon borders. There is considerable speculation, especially by minor officials stationed along the river, as to the eventual destination of these arms once they reach Thailand. Northeast insurgents are usually armed with Chinese AK-47s, rather than M-16s.

Thai police carried out a nation-wide series of arrests in May, aimed at weapons smugglers and communist sympathizers. The majority of arrests were in the Northeast, particularly in Mekong border towns but also in Udorn. The Udorn arrests involved both a canton chief and a village headman. The canton chief, Buasa Khammukchik, has apparently helped more than 400 Vietnamese refugees in Udorn obtain Thai ID cards. Police admit that the more important smugglers eluded raiding parties due to security leaks. CONFIDENTIAL.

5. Insecurity in Nakhon Phanom.
A. Huai Chanot Dam. Residents of Dong Luang canton, Nakae district, staged a series of protests in April against construction of the Huai Chanot Dam, a Royal Irrigation Department project that would inundate ricelands belonging to farmers in three villages. Province officials believe that insurgents initiated the protests because insurgent training sites, storage areas, and communication/liaison routes would go under water.

This is not the first time that Northeast villagers have protested resettlement. Their vociferousness in this instance, however, in addition to protests by three times as many people as would be affected by the move, is evidence of organized activity that only insurgents seem to be able to muster in this part of the country. CONFIDENTIAL. (Udorn 72).

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B. Assassinations. There were more than twenty assassinations in Nakhon Phanom during May (the province total for all of 1970 was 84). The inability of government forces to stop this insurgent tactic has resulted in a severe setback in morale among key provincial officials. Governor Yong na Nakhon, despite his good intentions and ardent spirit, has neglected RTG counter-insurgency operations against ethnic Thai terrorists in favor of an overzealous and misdirected campaign against Vietnamese refugees. Governor Yong, more from misunderstanding than design, has also managed to alienate the majority of the RTG officials in the province, particularly the police. This situation was manifested early in June, when a city-wide sweep was conducted in Nakhon Phanom to ferret out assassination teams, arms smugglers, pimps, and prostitutes. The operation failed to yield the desired results - no one was captured, and a police leak of the sweep is suspected. CONFIDENTIAL. (Udorn A-12).

6. Drugs. As a local step in RTG implementation of drug control measures, Korat Governor Radom Mahasaranond ordered all Korat pharmacies in early June to stop selling amphetamines and barbiturates without prescription. (Udorn 92). This is the first indication in the Northeast of RTG plans to combat illegal drug traffic. The problem, of course, is enforcing the order, particularly policing the many establishments authorized to sell drugs. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE.

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