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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

# AIRGRAM

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HANDLING INDICATOR

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INFO : Department of State, CHIENGMAI, SONGKHLA, VIENTIANE, SAIGON

FROM : Ameonsul UDORN

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SUBJECT : Northeast Thailand Quarterly Summary, January - March 1971

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CONTENTS:

1. Meeting of Northeast MP's.
2. Change in RTG Approach toward Vietnamese Refugees.
3. Weapons Smuggling from Laos.
4. Political Difficulties of the Nakhon Phanom Governor.
5. Violence on the Frontier.
6. The Insurgency.
7. Firing on USAF Helicopters.
8. Concentration of USIS Efforts at Khonkaen.

1. Meeting of Northeast MP's. A group of mainly opposition Members of Parliament from the Northeast held a two-day meeting February 13 and 14. The first day's meeting in Khonkaen was uneventful. When the group moved to Roi Et for the second day's meeting, however, they ran into an order from the Roi Et governor barring the meeting. The order followed instructions from the Army commander for the Northeast. The MP's defied the order and held the meeting anyway. In the political flap that followed, the police decided not to press charges. Opposition MP's were handed a good talking point against the government. But at the same time they are showing more caution about provoking government reaction.

The power behind the scene and wistful beneficiary of these meetings was General Prasert Ruchirawongs, the head of the Thai police. The

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Khonkaen - Roi Et meetings were scheduled to coincide with a visit by Prasert to Khonkaen, and he entertained the group at dinner two nights in a row. Prasert's courting of these MP's has been publicly evident in the Northeast for the last five months. (Udorn 146,11/4/70; Udorn A-2,1/8/71; Udorn 20,2/15/71)

2. Change in RTG Approach toward Vietnamese Refugees. The Thai government may be adopting an assimilatory and conciliatory policy toward the majority of Vietnamese refugees, most of whom live in the Northeast (Udorn 33). In Ubon, for example, the RTG has already made plans to attempt to differentiate between hard core pro-North Vietnamese cadre, and the bulk of the refugees who would prefer to be left politically alone and in Thailand. This differentiation is the first step in Plan 114, which the RTG approved last July. Neither efficiency nor speed of execution is a likely prospect.

3. Weapons Smuggling from Laos. US weapons issued to Lao forces are being smuggled with some frequency into Northeast Thailand. The weapons include M-16's and M-79's. Thai police seized one shipment in Ubon February 25 and another in Nakhon Phanom March 16 (Udorn 46).

4. Political Difficulties of the Nakhon Phanom Governor. The Governor of Nakhon Phanom province, Major General Yong na Nakhon, has accumulated the ire of a number of groups in Nakhon Phanom. These include: two outspoken and popular opposition MP's; the regional police hierarchy; one faction of local Thai businessmen; virtually the entire Vietnamese community; and much of the local educational establishment. Governor Yong is a hard-working, earnest official, but his lack of political graces seems to alienate group after group. This situation may force the RTG to transfer him,to the probable detriment of the counter-insurgency campaign (Udorn 33).

5. Violence on the Frontier. In recent months a number of violent incidents, unrelated to the insurgency, called attention to the final solution as a method of settling disputes in Northeast Thailand. Udorn province, in particular, had a rash of them. The Udorn secretary of the Democratic Party was killed, apparently because he was exposing corruption involving land purchases for construction of a reservoir (Udorn 155, 11/27/70). The District Officer of Si Bun Ruang was injured by a bomb February 12; the district education officer and two teachers have been arrested and charged. A pork merchant was killed in the Udorn market March 12 in a dispute over the tremendous amount of



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profits and graft possible in the pork trade (Udorn 44). In Ubon a Community Development official was the victim of a rub-out, stemming from a grudge over an unpaid debt from gun-smuggling. And in the most sensational case, seven itinerant traders from Nakhon Phanom province were massacred in Loei province in early February, apparently by army troops coveting their wares. The case was so embarrassing to the army that it seems a whitewash is in the making, despite continued pressure from Members of Parliament and the press (Udorn 22 and 30).

6. The Insurgency. The trend of the last several quarters continued--the insurgents strengthened their organizational base, hindered very little by Thai government counter-insurgency efforts. The generally lower level of violence, however, should not mislead us into thinking that insurgent capacity for violence is reduced; it is simply a choice of tactics on their part. This was well-demonstrated by a coordinated series of attacks on village security posts in Sakon Nakhon province in January.

The Consulate March 5 published a review of the Northeast insurgency during 1970 (Udorn A-6).

7. Firing on USAF Helicopters. Three US Air Force helicopters were fired at from the ground during February and March. Two of them were hit, although they returned to their base safely (Udorn 31). Ballistics tests of two recovered rounds showed they were fired from AK-type weapons: one was an armor-piercing incendiary round. Northeast insurgents fired on Thai helicopters several times during April 1970, so the technique is not new. It is unlikely that insurgents distinguish between Thai and American helicopters: they probably regard any machine in the sky as unfriendly.

8. Concentration of USIS Efforts at Khonkaen. USIS decided during the quarter to close its branch posts at Ubon, Korat, and Udorn before the end of the fiscal year. At the same time USIS plans to build a new Center at Khonkaen, a major governmental hub in the Northeast, and the site of its only university and television station. As of July, Khonkaen should thus be the only USIS post in the Northeast. Two years ago there were eight.

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