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MBK-0017

3 June 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, EBIS
THROUGH : Chief, Operations Group
SUBJECT : Monthly Report - Bangkok Bureau - May 1981

I. GENERAL

The aftermath of the April Fool's Day coup attempt continued throughout the month, with the main and very obvious pattern being a return to the status quo preceding the abortive coup. The quick calls in late April for dismissals of civilian and military supporters of the coup were succeeded in early May by public demands of leniency for the coup leaders and participants. Ultimately, by the end of the month Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanon himself had publically declared a general amnesty for the coup plotters and leaders. On the heels of this controversial decision, Prem then had to withstand a no-confidence vote in Parliament on his beleaguered government. Thus, the 1 June scenario in Thailand appears disturbingly similar to the one that was apparent prior to 1 April: national leadership comes from a weak government under constant attack from a disunited but vocal opposition, and national defense relies on a military plagued by dissention and discontent.

Mother Nature also contributed to the local confusion and discomfort with an unusually early onset of the rainy season. The "Venice of the East," already saturated with weeks of rain, was literally inundated the weekend of 23-24 May by one of the heaviest rainfalls ever recorded. During that 48-hour period, the equivalent of one-seventh of Bangkok's annual rainfall pounded the city, with accumulations ranging from 9 to 13 inches in various parts of the city. Many streets, including portions of the major arteries, were closed to traffic, which disrupted travel and closed schools and businesses. Bureau personnel did not escape the hardships and damage wreaked by the flood. Problems ranged from overflowing toilets (on the second floor!) in one staffer's apartment to 3 inches of floodwater inside the bureau chief's residence. Needless to say, the Memorial Day holiday was not enjoyed in the traditional manner.

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II. OPERATIONS

A. Monitorial/Editorial

1. Indochina continued to make the most demands on bureau efforts during the month. Particular attention was paid to the continuing hot war climate along the Sino-Vietnamese border, a situation which produced almost daily battle reports. The long-awaited Fourth Congress of the Kampuchean Communist Party, which revealed for the first time the party's makeup, added legitimacy and respectability to the Phnom Penh regime and some 32,000 words to the Cambodian section's monthly production figures. The Thai government further churned up troubled Indochinese waters by announcing its intention to repatriate all Cambodian refugees. This prompted, quite naturally, sharp retorts from Hanoi and Phnom Penh who threatened to respond accordingly.

2. Unlike the adage applicable to March, May went out like a lion operationally with the shocking news on 30 May of the assassination of Bangladesh President Ziaur Rahman by disgruntled army officers, whom Dacca insisted upon calling "miscreants." Alerted by an AFP item, the bureau immediately juggled staffing to cope with the crisis and implemented an open-speaker watch. The crisis further pressed the understaffed Indian section, forcing the three monitors to give up days off to cope with the expanded coverage.

3. As a consequence of discussions at the recent bureau chief conference, a limited coverage realignment was initiated for South and Southeast Asia involving Gulf, Okinawa, and Bangkok bureaus. Bangkok will assume Okinawa's coverage of Australia and related areas on 8 June and the Hanoi English 1000 cast effective 21 June. The Australian coverage will be handled by the bureau's Indonesian team. On 16 May, Gulf assumed Bangkok's coverage of the Pakistani press and is looking into the possibility of acquiring Afghan papers to enable Bangkok to remove the final vestiges of its Afghan coverage.

4. In response to increased Headquarters' interest, midway through the month the bureau broadened its selection criteria for the Indian press. This initial effort resulted in a monthly production increase of 16,000 words. A similar effort is planned for Vietnamese press coverage.

5. As a logical consequence of its assumption of Australian coverage, the bureau is investigating the feasibility of covering the Philippines from Bangkok. A cruising survey is now underway to evaluate reception of Manila FEBC, Baguio Mountain Province Broadcasting Corporation, Radio Pilipina and Radio Veritas. The bureau presently monitors occasional PNA items carried by the Jakarta OANA "pool." If the survey is successful, the bureau will be forwarding its coverage recommendations to Headquarters

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III. ADMINISTRATION

A. Personnel

1. Final security and medical clearances for Hindi/Urdu applicant [] were received from the American Embassy in New Delhi. Administrative procedures are being expedited in the hope that Ahmad can report for duty on 28 June.

2. Indonesian/Malay monitor [] was hospitalized for several days in early May suffering from high and irregular blood pressure. After two weeks of convalescing at home, [] returned to work on 28 May.

3. Appropriate ceremonies were held on 19 May at Bang Ping and on 20 May at the bureau to present Federal Service pins to nine



4. It came as no surprise when a local (Embassy bulletin and Bangkok English-language press) advertising campaign for Cambodian/French monitor candidates drew an absolute blank. It was the first recruiting attempt using the lower (by more than \$4,000) starting salary required by the new FSN wage and classification system. The bureau will now have to look for TCN's in Australia or elsewhere, but we doubt we will be able to attract qualified applicants by offering a starting salary of less than \$5,000. There is still an outside chance that Cambodian monitor [] will be able to continue his employment, which would obviate the immediate need for recruitment and replacement.

B. Buildings and Grounds

Following more than a month of quiet, the Bang Ping site was vandalized for the third time in two months during the night of 24 May. On this occasion, the thieves took another piece of coaxial cable from an active antenna in the antenna field. The cable was cut from the 313-degree VLP antenna, the same place a piece of cable was taken less than two months ago. Letters from the bureau chief and the Embassy security office were sent to the chief of police responsible for the Bang Ping area asking for their cooperation in stopping the vandalism. This seemed to spark increased police action, with several arrests being made, but it also prompted threats to Bang Ping personnel, indicating that not all those involved have been apprehended.

IV. VISITS

A. To the Bureau:

On 21 May, Assistant NIO for East Asia [] visited the bureau in the company of the local NFAC representative. At his request,

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he was thoroughly briefed on the bureau's operations and discussed primarily Cambodian and Thai issues with senior editor [redacted] and the bureau's deputy chief and chief.

B. From the Bureau:

The bureau chief visited London Bureau on 7 May for a briefing on the ROSET system en route home from the bureau chief conference. He also took the opportunity to meet BBC's new [redacted]

[redacted]
Chief, Bangkok Bureau, FBIS

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Attachments:

Engineering
Production Report
Production Report by Language, Country & Source
Embassy Circuit Outage Report

Distribution:

C/Okinawa Bureau

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