

Thais Hand Refugee Role To 3 World Relief Groups

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BANGKOK, Thailand, Aug. 5 —Thailand has reached an agreement with three international relief organizations under which they are taking over most of the responsibility for the Indochinese refugees who continue to enter this country. The move is apparently designed to ease some of the tensions the refugees have created between Thailand and her Communist neighbors.

The first test of whether the effort will be successful may be a visit to Hanoi by Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan of Thailand, first by a senior Thai leader to an Indochinese country since the Communists took over in South Vietnam and Cambodia in April.

Agreements between Thailand, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross were worked out by Mr. Chatichai in a visit to Geneva last month and in subsequent meetings here between other Thai and international relief officials.

"There is no question that the role of the high commissioner is to lessen tensions between states, and we hope we will play that role here," said a United Nations official from Geneva who has spent several weeks conferring in Geneva, Bangkok, Hanoi and Peking.

Talks With All Parties

"We have been and continue to be in touch with all parties concerned — the Governments in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, China and the representatives of the Cambodian Communist Government in Peking, Hanoi and Paris," the official added.

Malaysia, by virtue of its position one step removed from direct contact with the new Communist states of Indochina, has adopted a somewhat more relaxed attitude toward the Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees who went there, primarily by ship, after the takeover of Indochina.

Last month, the Malaysian Government signed an agree-

ment with the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees that would allow some 1,000 Cambodian refugees to stay on in the country with the United Nations group providing up to \$600,000 over the next several months. There are as well a smaller number of Vietnamese still left there, although more are leaving each week for Australia and the United States.

In September, the High Commissioner for Refugees, Saddudin Aga Khan, will visit Thailand as part of a tour that is expected to include Hanoi and possibly Saigon as well. At the same time senior Red Cross officials have also been invited to tour the refugee areas of Thailand.

In a series of recent meetings the three principal international refugee organizations operating here—the high commissioner's office, the Red Cross and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration—have agreed to divide the burdens of caring for the refugees, who are conservatively estimated to number more than 40,000.

Fund Raising Planned

The high commissioner's office plans to begin soon a major worldwide fund-raising drive, much of it centered in the United States, to care for the remaining refugees from Indochina.

Late last month several international relief officials returned from Saigon, where a thrice-weekly relief shuttle flight has been set up to and from Vientiane, Laos. Canned meat and medicines are being shipped in on these flights as well as on ships into Saigon, the officials said.

The principal objective of relief efforts in South Vietnam now, the officials said, is to return to their home villages

the hundreds of thousands of people who had been displaced by the war — either because they were forcibly shifted by the former Saigon government or because they had fled areas of heavy fighting.

Soon, these officials said, relief offices will be established in Saigon that will coordinate the return of refugees from other countries—principally the United States and Thailand. But, the officials added, the Communist authorities in Saigon do not seem to be in a hurry to allow these refugees back into the country.

Thailand did not sign the 1951 United Nations Convention and its subsequent protocol on the status of refugees. The protocol's demands include pledges from a government that refugees coming into its country would not be forced back to the country from which they fled and that they would be given asylum, help toward assimilation and travel documents and other papers.

Thailand has refused to pledge any of these guarantees, and some relief officials wonder how long the refugees in Thailand can be kept isolated in squalid camps, with their futures uncertain and the threat of forced return to their countries.

1,500 Vietnamese

The Vietnamese refugees constitute the smallest group remaining here. According to Thai Government figures, which have always been conservatively low, they now number about 1,500. Most of them are expected eventually to leave, probably for the United States, where relatives of many of them have already gone.

The Thai Government has brought most of these refugees into one camp at Sattahip near U Taphao air base on the Gulf of Siam—taking them from a number of small centers near where they landed by boat or plane from South Vietnam.

The Cambodian refugees constitute the next largest group—at least 8,000 people—and are scattered through six refugee camps near the Cambodian-Thai border.

Most Serious Problem

Thailand considers the Cambodian refugees the most serious long-term problem since no discussions have started with the new Cambodian Government about having some of them return.

Thailand continues to speak of forcing these refugees back across the border. A handful of them have gone back voluntarily, but reports that most of these have been killed—whether true or not—are likely to make it virtually impossible now to persuade any of those remaining to return voluntarily.

On the other hand, Thailand has expressed opposition to any assimilation, restricting the refugees to camps that are virtual prisons, guarded by Government soldiers and border policemen.

Thailand has been making a major effort, assisted now by the high commissioner's office and the International Red Cross, to find other countries that will accept the Cambodians.

30,000 From Laos

Similar restrictions and attempts at repatriation involve the more than 30,000 Laotian refugees. They consist of at least three groups — a small number of relatively wealthy rightists largely from Vientiane and southern Laos, most of whom have by now left for Paris; a somewhat larger group of perhaps 2,500 ethnic Thais who have lived most of their lives in Laos and are now fleeing back to Thailand, and the largest group of some 29,000 Meos and other ethnic tribesmen who followed their leader, Gen. Vang Pao, into exile here.