

# Thailand's Amiable Leader

NYTimes

Thanom Kittikachorn

NOV 18 1971

Thanom Kittikachorn, who heads the group of military and other leaders who seized power in Thailand yesterday, has been Premier of his country since 1963, when he announced that his aim was to "do good, do good, do good." At the time, there were few who thought that the mild,

Man conciliatory military man could do well enough. He was appointed Premier to succeed Sarit Thanarat, who had seized power five years before. Field Marshal Sarit had been the model of an Asian strongman, and Thanom, his deputy, seemed unlikely to fit the mold of power.

But the new Premier's challenge to his formidable predecessor took the form of an intensive de-Stalinization campaign. His Cabinet announced publicly that Field Marshal Sarit's estate of \$140-million included \$31-million in state funds and took steps to get the money back.

And at the same time that the Bangkok papers featured report after report about the new Premier as a model family man who went straight home from work to enjoy such innocent amusements as playing badminton with his wife and six children, there was a spate of contrasting publicity about Field Marshal Sarit.

The regime produced a book entitled "Sarit's 100

Wives," which detailed the extent of Field Marshal Sarit's corruption, stressing his many liaisons and the property he had settled on his "minor wives," as mistresses are known in Thailand. Premier Thanom also took steps to strip the "minor wives" of their ill-earned income.

## Ties to West Reaffirmed

Premier Thanom reaffirmed his predecessor's alignment with the West, declaring his Government to be "100 per cent anti - Communist." In Thailand, he is pictured as a conciliator — mediating, or trying to mediate between rival factions within the Government, and having the advantage of his undoubted strength in the army, through which he rose to power.

He was born Aug. 11, 1911, in a village in northwest Thailand, about 240 miles from Bangkok. In 1920, he was sent to the Royal Thai Military Academy, graduating in 1929.

He rose steadily, seeing active service in 1941 and serving as an instructor at the military academy. He was a major general by 1951 and three years later was named commanding general of the First Army, which controlled the Bangkok area. He had already become a member of the House of Representatives and then a Cabinet Minister and played a key role in the military coup d'état that brought Field Marshal Sarit to power.

In 1958 he was appointed

Premier by Field Marshal Sarit, accepting with outspoken reluctance a job he was unable to hold for more than 10 months. Then Field Marshal Sarit took over the premiership and made Thanom his deputy.

## A Threat From the Left

During his present term of office, Premier Thanom has had to meet the threat of the Thailand Patriotic Front, a movement backed by Communist China that seeks to overthrow the Government by guerrilla activity. His response, which has taken the form of both military and economic involvement in the threatened regions, appears to have had some success.

In 1968 a new constitution was promulgated, and the following year Premier Thanom apparently felt secure enough to permit the first general election in Thailand in 11 years. Premier Thanom's Government was given a substantial plurality.

Premier Thanom is a courteous and amiable man with close-cropped gray hair.

Both his two sons—he also has four daughters—followed him into the military. He himself holds the rank of field marshal and still has the bearing of a military man. Although he is undeniably devoted to the military, he is even more undeniably a Thai, a combination that can be contradictory. When he became Premier, for example, he complained to a aide: "I have become Americanized. I'm rushing all the time."