

Thailand's Ties With Cambodia Appear Warmer

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BANGKOK, Thailand, July 29 — Thailand's relations with Cambodia appear to be warming substantially as her relations with her other Communist neighbors, Vietnam and Laos, are chilling.

For the first time, the Phnom Penh radio hinted last weekend at the possibility of talks between the Thai and Cambodian leaders. At the same time, Premier Kukrit Pramoj proposed face-to-face talks, either in Phnom Penh or Bangkok.

Recent border skirmishes between Laos and Thailand on the Mekong River boundary, and rather belligerent broadcasts by the Hanoi radio indicate, according to senior Thai Foreign Ministry officials, that this country's relations with Vietnam and Laos are becoming strained.

Common Ties Are Stressed

"We seriously believe that normalization of relations between Thailand and Cambodia will take place much more quickly and much sooner than with Vietnam," a Foreign Ministry official said. "There are many many common bonds, ethnically, culturally, geographically with Cambodia that are simply not there when we talk about Vietnam."

However, many of these relationships sustained what could become a serious new strain as the American Embassy announced that a series of joint Thai United States naval maneuvers would be held late next month in the Gulf of Siam, not far from the point where Cambodian naval vessels last month seized the freighter *Mayaguez*.

American officials declined to disclose the extent of these maneuvers, which are expected to involve at least a half dozen warships from each country, but two weeks of rumors of an exercise touched off a volley of condemnations, particularly from the North Vietnamese.

Premier Kukrit and Foreign Minister Chataichai Choonhavan in effect told North Vietnam to mind its own business, the premier saying that such exercises were necessary to "prevent rust from forming on our ships" and Mr. Chataichai

saying that the exercises were solely an issue between the United States and Thailand and posed no threat to and are not the business of any third country.

Before the fall of Phom Penh and then of Saigon to the Communists, delegations from Vietnam arrived in Bangkok with smiles, handshakes and promises of a new era of peace and friendship. The Vietnamese diplomats were entertained here in the capital and at the seaside resort of Pattaya, and earnest and serious discussions

were said to have been held behind closed doors.

There were promises of a visit to Hanoi by Deputy Premier Chataichai Choonhavan. With more smiles and handshakes, the Vietnamese diplomats ended their visit here.

But in the succeeding weeks there was no further talk of the Vietnamese; there were no programed leaks, a usual practice, of what had gone on behind the closed doors. Even today, in the most frank discussions, Foreign Ministry officials abruptly change the subject if Vietnam is mentioned. Now the visit of Mr. Chataichai to Hanoi has not definitely been set for August; "the date has not yet been fixed," officials say.

Since the time of handshakes and smiles, Premier Kukrit has journeyed to Peking and to member states of the association of South-east Asian nations, preaching friendship with all, and the Hanoi radio, in the same period, has turned on Thailand. It seized upon

rumors in Thai newspapers of a joint Thai-American naval exercise in the Gulf of Siam.

"It will be a provocative, bellicose act on the part of Washington and the Kukrit Pramoj administration opposing the Southeast Asian peoples including the Thai people," the Hanoi radio said on July 19. Similar charges have been made almost daily ever since.

Still apparently rankling Hanoi was the flight of hundreds of South Vietnamese planes to Thailand in the last hours before the fall of Saigon, April 30. Thailand, the North Vietnamese newspaper *Nhan Dan* said, as late as last week, "has helped the United States illegally appropriate many Vietnamese aircraft flown into Thailand by personnel of the former Saigon puppet armed forces and administration."

But Cambodia has shifted to a tone of new friendship and conciliation. "Since last week, there has been the best atmosphere ever for prospects

for good relations between Cambodia and Thailand," the Phnom Penh radio announced Saturday, in a broadcast monitored here. "The Cambodian and Thai peoples also have a long tradition of peace and security in Southeast Asia and the world as a whole," the broadcast said.

Foreign Ministry officials here are most concerned, however, over the apparent sudden worsening of relations between Thailand and Laos—two countries, these officials note, that have traditionally been close friends. They share a virtually common language, alphabet, culture and ethnic links.

Yet in recent days, fanned by a series of what in most cases turned out to be unsubstantiated rumors in the English-language newspapers of Bangkok, the countries' relations have cooled. After printing the rumors, two of the Bangkok, the countries' relations in Laos.