

# A Brief Look at Thailand

**POPULATION**—About 75 percent of Thailand's population of more than 40 million is of Thai stock. Some 14 percent are overseas Chinese, an urban group important in banking, mining and commerce. Other minorities are of Malaysian, Indian, Khmer and Vietnamese descent.

**GEOGRAPHY**—Situated in southeast Asia, Thailand is bounded by Burma in the west and north, Laos in the northeast, Cambodia in the southeast, and Malaysia in the south. Its area is 198,250 square miles—about four times as large as New York State—and its capital is Bangkok.

**ECONOMY**—Like most Southeast Asian countries, Thailand is predominantly rural, with about 80 percent of its labor force engaged in agriculture. Rice is the main crop and Thailand is one of the world's largest rice exporters. Other leading exports are corn and tin. The country has a wealth of mineral resources.

**LEADERS**—Thailand (formerly Siam) has been an independent monarchy under its King Phumiphol Aduldet, who is 48 years old. He assumed the throne in 1950. Until yesterday the country's Prime Minister was Seni Pramoj, who has served in that post three times. His brother, Kukrit Pramoj, also was Prime Minister briefly.

**MILITARY**—Military service is required from able-bodied men between the ages of 21 and 30 and the army's peacetime strength is estimated at 150,000. There is a small navy and a modest air force that was reorganized with the help of the American Military Air Advisory Group.

The United States maintained a large military presence in Thailand for 26 years—reaching a peak of 48,000 troops in 1969 during the Vietnam war. But in July the withdrawal of all American troops was completed at the re-



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quest of a civilian Thai government.

**HISTORY**—Early records indicate that the Siamese people migrated to the region from Yunnan Province of China about 1,000 years ago. Toward the end of the 18th century, Burmese armies conquered the kingdom but were eventually driven out. After the British conquered Burma in 1826, the Siamese initiated diplomatic approaches that enabled their country to survive as the only Southeast Asian power free of European domination in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The country was an absolute monarchy until 1932. Since then the Government has been controlled at most times by military cliques that succeeded each other by coups d'état.