

Thailand's Military Cracks Down On Vietnamese as 'Subversives'

NONG KHAI, Thailand (AP)—The new martial law regime is cracking down on the large Vietnamese community in Thailand. It says that the actions are designed to control areas of potential Communist subversion.

"It looks like we Vietnamese will have no more freedom in this country," said one of the nearly 100 Vietnamese arrested in Nong Khai. "The Government is getting tougher and tougher on us."

The police here say that they have seized about 3,000 documents they describe as Communist in nature, pictures of the late President Ho Chi Minh of North Vietnam and private correspondence between Vietnamese in Thailand and Vietnam.

Nong Khai, a town of about 50,000 people, is stirring with border patrol police, special forces units and troops of the Thai Army's Third Division. Searches of Vietnamese homes are everyday occurrences. With more than 4,000 to 5,000 old-time Vietnamese residents and 16,000 refugees from Communist-governed Laos across the Mekong River from here, the area is considered by Thai authorities a potential center of Communist subversion.

Thai Leftists Flee to Laos

There is another reason for increased police and army surveillance in Nong Khai, a Mekong River crossing point into Laos. The provincial governor says that more than 300 leftist Thai students, politicians and Vietnamese subversives have fled to Laos since the military took power in Thailand in a coup Oct. 6.

Some Thais and Vietnamese confided that a few of their friends either had swum the half-mile-wide Mekong or crossed the swift currents in small boats since the military seized power and began a sweep of what it considers potential subversives.

"I was sitting in my house. Suddenly three policemen came in and began

searching through every room," said the Vietnamese prisoner, Tran Van Linh, in an interview in jail. "They took portraits of Ho Chi Minh from the wall and private correspondence with friends of mine in Hanoi. Of course I have friends in Vietnam, but I'm not a subversive."

Mr. Linh, a merchant who has lived in Thailand for 19 years, said that he was ready to return to Vietnam if Hanoi and Bangkok reached an agreement.

Thailand's Vietnamese minority, living chiefly in the northeast and numbering some 60,000, has been a source of tension between Vietnam and Thailand since the early 1950's, when thousands fled their homeland in the wake of the French Indochina war.

Efforts at Repatriation Fail

Numerous efforts at repatriation have proved fruitless. With the growth of Thailand's Communist insurgency, the economically influential Vietnamese community has been regarded by many as a breeding ground for guerrillas and a channel for Hanoi's support of the rebellion.

One of the first announcements of the new Government accused "Vietnamese Communists" of fomenting student demonstrations in Bangkok that led to bloody street fighting Oct. 6.

The official Vietnamese press and radio responded with invective against Bangkok, accusing the new regime of persecuting the Vietnamese minority.

Opinions vary whether the anti-Vietnamese mood will develop into real persecutions. Some knowledgeable people say the leaders in Bangkok know that violence against the Vietnamese could bring a confrontation with Hanoi, something Bangkok wishes to avoid. There also are indications that some of the tough talk and police actions are designed partly for home consumption.