

TWENTY CENTS

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Artzybasheff

SIAM'S KING PHUMIPHON

In a never-never land, never mind.

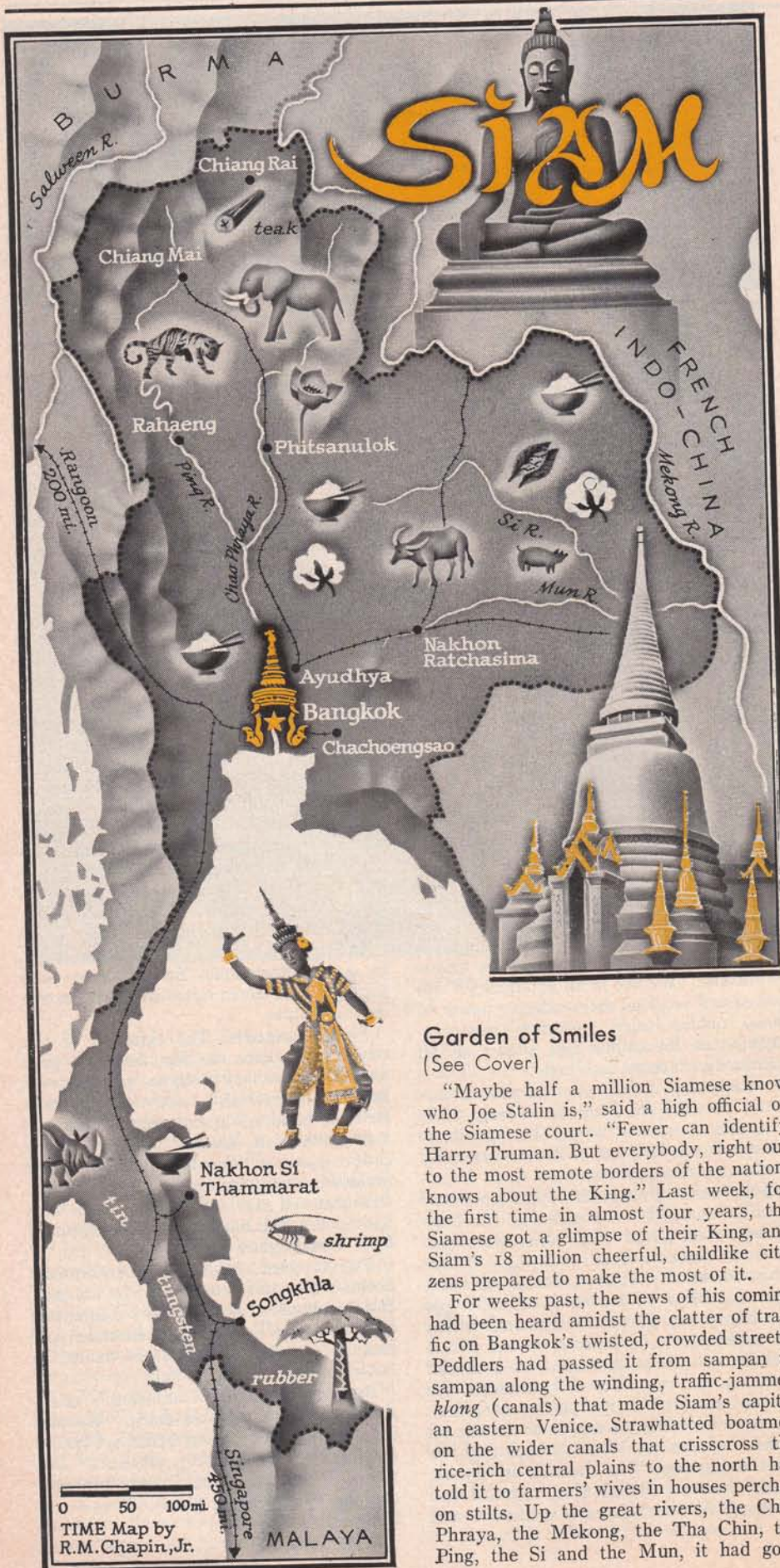
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VOL. LV NO. 14

FOREIGN NEWS



Garden of Smiles

(See Cover)

"Maybe half a million Siamese know who Joe Stalin is," said a high official of the Siamese court. "Fewer can identify Harry Truman. But everybody, right out to the most remote borders of the nation, knows about the King." Last week, for the first time in almost four years, the Siamese got a glimpse of their King, and Siam's 18 million cheerful, childlike citizens prepared to make the most of it.

For weeks past, the news of his coming had been heard amidst the clatter of traffic on Bangkok's twisted, crowded streets. Peddlers had passed it from sampan to sampan along the winding, traffic-jammed *klong* (canals) that made Siam's capital an eastern Venice. Strawhatted boatmen on the wider canals that crisscross the rice-rich central plains to the north had told it to farmers' wives in houses perched on stilts. Up the great rivers, the Chao Phraya, the Mekong, the Tha Chin, the Ping, the Si and the Mun, it had gone

with wandering merchants thumbing barge rides. On the lips of mendicants with shaven heads and shaven eyebrows it had traveled through cobra-ridden jungles where tigers lurked and elephants lurched, and on into the cool, airy teak-wood forests of the uplands. In ancient, serpent-topped temples, yellow-robed monks prepared a welcome.

As the Great God on My Head Phumiphon Adundet,* the Power Coming from the Strength of the Earth, at long last stepped ashore from the flagship *Sri Ayuthia* onto Siamese soil, every temple bell in the land rang out a greeting.

All Grinning. TIME Correspondent John Stanton cabled the following report of Phumiphon's return:

"Bangkok's newspapers appeared in odd-colored inks to mark the day—red, blue, green, and a raspberry known locally as impulsive red. Instead of news stories they carried long columns of verse. At 5 a.m., a navy radio station began to broadcast the proceedings. It was a most discreet broadcast, failing to mention that when the King was transferring by PT boat from the liner *Selandia* to the *Sri Ayuthia*, he did a good-humored dance to the buffeting of the waves.

"As the *Sri Ayuthia* came up the Chao Phraya river, thousands of sampans rushed out to greet him, and radios blared recordings of *Anchor's Aweigh* and the King's own musical compositions. By noon of a blistering day, crowds jammed all Bangkok vantage points. At 3 p.m. a landing stage at the Memorial Bridge collapsed, pitching a hundred people into the water. Since all Siamese seem to be born swimmers, no one was drowned. Since all Siamese are born cheerful, all came up grinning.

"Along the broad King's Walk, behind whose fashionable modern apartment buildings lurk some of its best-advertised houses of prostitution, Chinese merchants set up hobbyhorse displays and giant paintings of the King. Incense candles were made ready to be lighted and to waft pleasant smells (very important in Siam) when the King arrived. A youngster got tired of waiting, climbed up into a tree and went to sleep. Passers-by tickled the soles of his feet. He went on sleeping. Police wormed their way through the crowd notifying property owners that a police order issued the day before had been a big mistake: contrary to the order, people were allowed to watch the procession from rooftops.

"The Royal Guards, in their red coats,

* Pronounced more or less as Poom-ee-pone a-DOON-l-dade. There are several systems in use for transliterating Siamese into English. None of them is adequate to reproduce exactly the sounds of the Siamese, in whose language a final *l*, *r* and *n* all sound alike, *se* and *ra* at the end of a word are silent, *t* is pronounced like *d*, and *b* and *p* sound alike but have no exact counterpart in English. Phumiphon himself prefers the Sanskrit transliteration, recently gave orders that his own name be spelled Bhumibol Adulyadej.

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black pants and spiked helmets, stood as stiffly as guards at Buckingham Palace. But there was a difference. In Siam there is always a difference. Water boys stood by the guards, watching them closely. When they saw a soldier close his eyes and sway, they would rush up, slosh water down his neck and give him a whiff of smelling salts.

"When at last the King came ashore, three small airplanes circled overhead dropping parachutes with bunches of flowers and spraying puffed rice (the gift of greeting) over the town. In a pavilion near the landing stage, the King sat down on his throne and his uncle, the Prince Regent, turned over the powers of the state to him. The King took up the sword of state and thanked the regent. Then, glancing at the Master of the Royal Household to make sure it was all right, the King walked over and exchanged a few words with the British and U.S. ambassadors. He spoke a few words into a golden microphone and stepped into his Daimler, which started with a jerk."

Traditional, You Know. "At intervals during the ceremonies he tried to keep cool by taking showers. On the morning after his arrival the King gave rice to mendicants (as do all good Siamese householders), took another shower and then went to receive the Candle Blessing at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, a 30-inch figure made of jasper. It sits in a circular room whose walls are covered with murals of scenes from Buddha's life. The murals are as explicit as comic strips, but they have a freshness and a beguiling charm that comic strips have not.

"The King entered followed by a double row of nobles and officers of the guard dressed in the white uniform of the Chakkri dynasty to which Phumiphon belongs. A group of their wives (the King's own



Keystone-Underwood

TEMPLE FIGURE

On alternate days, no adultery!

wives* used to play this role) stood in a square around the back of the altar, separated from the men on each side by a little fence with an opening in it. Last to enter were three Brahman priests in lacy cassocks, who stood near the door in front of a small table covered with candles and incense pots. When all were in place, conch-shell music came sobbing in through the temple doorways. Phumiphon bowed deeply to the Emerald Buddha, knelt and touched his forehead to the floor before minor statues of the god, and lit candles before each. Everyone sat down.

Flutes joined the conch shells and the music came louder. The Brahman priests were chanting softly. Incense began to fill the air. One by one 15 candles were lit, and in chain they began to pass from hand to hand clockwise through the little opening from the men to the women.

"Three times the chain of candles made the circuit, drums joining the music triumphantly at the completion of each cir-

cuit, and then the candles were passed back to the table where the Brahmins blew them out. The ceremony ended with the symbolic cleansing of the King's feet: the chief priest crawled to the King, anointed his shoes with scented water and wiped them with a silk scarf.

"Then Phumiphon got into his Daimler and drove back to the palace, where he had another shower. What he thought of it all, none knew. Perhaps he shared the skepticism of his cousin, Prince Chumphot, who had officiated at a similar ceremony during the previous week. At its conclusion, Prince Chumphot had turned to a Western guest and said: 'I'm interested to know what you make of all this. Traditional, of course, you know. But pure superstition.'"

As Clouds Gather. Chumphot, Phumiphon and many of their countrymen had been strongly influenced by the West. For good & ill, Siam was changing, yet it remained outside the main patterns of transition through which its neighbors were passing. Unique in many ways, Siam was most important in the fact that it had escaped any serious contact with Western imperialism. India had been unified by imperialism and its cultures had been left more or less intact under a veneer of Westernization; its rulers in independence were trying to bring old & new together. Burma's ancient way of life had been all but destroyed by Western rule; now the Westerners had left Burma and it was wallowing in chaos. To Siam's east lay Indo-China, where the Westerners refused to leave and where the Communists had been able to take advantage of a confusion second only to Burma's. To Siam's north lay China, the most tragic example of the contact between East & West. South and East of Siam were Indonesia



Jack Birns—LIFE

SIAMESE BOXERS

In a neutral corner, soft music.



Roy Rowan—LIFE

ASTROLOGER YARNAVEJ

In the stars, four suckling mice.

* The first five kings of the Chakkri dynasty (founded 1782) averaged approximately 30 wives apiece. Besides pleasing the king, ornamenting public functions and assuring the continuity of the dynasty, these ladies were highly useful in maintaining the authority of the crown. Most of them were the daughters of powerful feudal nobles, and their presence in the royal harem made them valuable to the king both as informers and as hostages against any possible disloyalty on the part of their families. One method of helping the king pick a likely mate, in the days before cameras made it possible for him to get a hint of her charms, consisted of standing the prospect in the hot sun until she perspired freely. The beads of sweat were then carefully mopped up with a square of cambric which was then sent on to the king for an adjudicatory sniff. Present Siamese law allows each man only one wife at a time, but many a Siamese goes ahead and takes another wife anyway.

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and the Philippines, the most hopeful cases of what could happen after imperialism's exit. West and south of Siam was Malaya, where imperialism still had an uneasy grip.

Siam's virtues and defects were still largely its own, not a bastard product of two civilizations. Phumiphon's never-never land was a land of what-might-have-been, a jewel of (almost) unblemished Easternism shining on the junk heap of the wrecked empires. Like a jewel, Siam was temptingly easy to pick up. The Communist imperialists who had taken China might turn Siam's way any time.

The prize included the world's largest postwar (1,300,000 tons a year) exportable surplus of rice, a booming rubber and tin production, and a docile people. Siam was no bulwark, but the old land and its young King were worth a good look, as a garden is worth a good look as storm clouds gather.

Westernization was brought to Siam largely by her own people who went abroad to study. In the 1920s a group of young Siamese revolutionists formed in Paris' Left Bank cafés. Two of them were Pridhi Banomyong and Phibun Songgram, who were to become rivals and to alternate in control of modern Siam. The revolutionists returned in 1932 to stage a coup which made Siam a constitutional monarchy. King Prajadhipok ceased to be the last absolute monarch left in the world.

The Boy from Brookline. Phumiphon had been born in 1927 in a Cambridge hospital while his father, Prince Mahidol, half-brother of Prajadhipok,* studied medicine at Harvard. The first years of Phumiphon's life were spent in the suburban atmosphere of Brookline, Mass. A few years later, after his father's death, he had moved with his mother, sister, and elder brother Ananda to Lausanne, Switzerland. Six years after that childless King Prajadhipok abdicated in favor of his nephew Ananda.

In 1946, Phumiphon went home to Siam with his brother. Ananda, Siamese remember, was a strange young King. Full of Western ideas, he refused to talk to visitors who sat on the floor below him Siamese fashion, insisting that they sit on chairs level with himself. Since shyness is a Siamese characteristic, the visitors often found themselves unable to talk in such a presumptuous position; King and subject would sit in silence, both blushing. Siamese tell of Ananda's visits to little villages near Bangkok. He would summon up all his courage, walk up to an old woman and ask, "Grandmother, how go things

with you?" The woman would probably burst into tears at the thought that she had been addressed by a King, and Ananda would stand before her, eyes downcast and silent.

Ananda liked to drive a jeep around the palace grounds, and he liked to play with guns. One day he fell sick. His mother brought him some castor oil and left him alone to sleep. A few hours later, Ananda was found dead in his bed, a pistol beside him and a bullet through his head.

The event is said to have marked the birth of public opinion in Siam. Up to that point the people had not approved or disapproved of public events; almost



Dmitri Kessel—LIFE

PHUMIPHON'S SIRIKIT
Par for the ancestors: thirty wives.

everybody disapproved of the death of Ananda. Murder was whispered, then shouted. A cabinet fell. An inquiry commission decided that Ananda had been shot either by himself or somebody else. A trial began more than a year ago and is expected to last ten years more.

Phumiphon was desolated. Wandering about the palace grounds, he saw a guard turn a group of peasants away from Ananda's funeral urn (in which his remains were folded into the traditional fetal position), because the peasants were not dressed in proper mourning. Brusquely Phumiphon ordered the gates opened to them. Two months after Ananda's death, Phumiphon left "to resume his studies" in Switzerland. Two million tearful Siamese lined his road to the airport, casting jasmine flowers under the wheels of his car. Ananda's funeral was postponed four years until Phumiphon got back.

In Lausanne, Phumiphon's studies consisted of a passionate interest in photography, music, and racy automobiles. He also sometimes read a law book. He liked

to organize orchestras and jump about from the drums to the horns to the piano. He composed dance tunes, both Western and Siamese style. Many mammas of the Siamese nobility got the idea that the climate of Lausanne would be good for their daughters. Quite a "court" developed around Phumiphon. Winner of the tournament was the Princess Sirikit Kitiyakara, who also likes music.

"Too Much of the Stars." Late this month, after attending to the cremation of his brother, Phumiphon will marry Sirikit on a day set by astrologers. No one in Bangkok makes a move without consulting an astrologer. In a recent speech opening the Bangkok branch of the Bank of America, U.S. Ambassador Edwin L. Stanton found it diplomatic to mention that the astrologers had found the date propitious.

Batches of astrologers operate about the Grand Palace every day, telling fortunes for a tical (a tical's a nickel) each, but better-class Siamese consider them quacks. Real astrologers are learned men, members of the Astrological Society of Siam, who usually hold clerks' jobs in government offices by day and practice their profession in their homes at night, for fees up to 100 tics per fortune.

Siamese astrology got a wonderful break in the 13th Century. A skeptical king sent for a famed astrologer known as "The Abbot of the Forest." Before the seer appeared, the King ordered one of his servants to catch a mouse, place it under an inverted golden bowl. Then the Abbot was called in. "Now," said the King, "what lies under the golden bowl?"

"A creature with five lives," said the Abbot.

The King chortled the 13th Century Siamese equivalent of "Aha, we got him," and ordered a page to lift the bowl. There lay the mouse, suckling four young. After that, there was no stopping the astrologers. Some, however, think they have gone too far. Siam's most revered astrologer, Phya Hora Thibodi Yarnavej, retired a few years ago with a bitter valedictory:

"Astrologers have become too mercenary. I prefer to play the violin and grow orchids. If you think too much about the stars, you get muddled in the head."

Bapa v. Bunya. There are other superstitions, including the *suea yant*, a red jacket enscribed with Cambodian letters which is guaranteed to protect the wearer against all harm so long as he has faith in the magic jacket. Seven lucky possessors of these jackets in one of Bangkok's northern suburbs recently took advantage of their invulnerability to terrorize the neighborhood. A fortnight ago, some 50 of their fed-up neighbors took axes and dropped in on the seven to test their magic garments. Before the cops arrived three of the seven were dead. But a brisk demand for the red jackets continued. The dead men, everybody agreed, lacked faith.

On a far higher plane than such folklore

* Siam's royal family tree tends to grow inward. Seven of the nine Chakkri kings were the offsprings of marriages between half-brothers and half-sisters. Phumiphon's father, Prince Mahidol, who never became king, was the grandson of King Mongkut, of *Anna and the King of Siam* fame, on both his father's and his mother's side.



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FOREIGN NEWS



"RAMWONG" HEPCATS

Acme

Fish fights, moth bites, lady kites and Mexican beer.



CAT & KING

Dmitri Kessel—LIFE

is the religion of the Siamese. They claim theirs is the purest form of Buddhism in the world; many travelers have been impressed by the relaxed and decorous atmosphere of Siamese temples, the devotees reclining with happy, compassionate smiles, the priests all dignity and kindness. Buddhists believe a man by good works stores up *bunya* (merits) to balance against his *bapa* (sins).

A Buddhist monk may not preach until the congregation asks him to. He usually asks that they gain *bunya* by agreeing (for one day, not for life) to obey five commandments: 1) thou shalt not kill anything, not even the mosquito that bites you, 2) nor steal, 3) nor lie, 4) nor commit adultery, 5) nor take intoxicating drinks. Many Siamese strike a balance between *bunya* and *bapa* by agreeing to observe commandments 4 and 5 only on alternate days.

Mai Ben Rai. This moderation even in virtue is characteristic of Siam. As the Spaniard says *manana*, so the Siamese says *mai ben rai*. If a government official is proved crooked or a wife unfaithful, if a favorite gamecock refuses to fight or an old friend proves treacherous, the Siamese says *mai ben rai*. It means never mind.

Are all the spies in Bangkok lodged, as rumor says, in the Oriental Hotel? *Mai ben rai*.

Is the Communist menace closing in? *Mai ben rai*.

Have the Chinese got most of the money in the country away from Siamese who consider engaging in trade a little too worldly? *Mai ben rai*.

Who needed money anyway? There were fish in the rivers and rice in the green paddies. The poorest woman in all Siam could give a hungry traveler enough rice to fill

his belly to bursting. Fat mangoes, melons, coconuts and bananas grew ripe in every backyard in Bangkok and were left on the ground to spoil.

A Day of Rest. There were other good things in the backyards of Bangkok to keep the mind off politics. For those who like quiet sport and a good wager, any Sunday in Siam (the Buddhist day of rest, based on lunar movements, comes at irregular intervals so the Siamese have long since adopted the Christian Sunday) will find the fish-fighters at it in Bangkok's yards. Earnest, silent men, each bearing a small jar of water containing a tiny, finny warrior, range their entries side by side on a betting table and arrange their wagers with upraised hand while the fish glare at one another through their glass walls. When the preliminary betting is done, two fish are dumped together into a larger jar. More bets are made as the tiny warriors tangle in a whirl of jaws and fins. Then, as the betting on each pair is finished, a line of 50 or 60 jars, each containing a tiny silent battle, accumulates on another long table while the fish fight on. Hours later one or another contestant is dead or skulking miserably on the bottom. On the way home that night the owners of fish which have surrendered toss the cravens into the nearest *klong*.

On Sundays in the hot season there are the contests sponsored by the Bangkok City Committee for Kite-Flying, a municipal government department. Teams of flying "gentleman" kites, armed with abrasive barbs, are maneuvered to foul huge, diamond-shaped "lady" kites flown by the defenders, while Siam's normally soft-voiced citizens shout encouragement that can be heard from one end of town to the other.

At Rajadamnern Stadium Siamese pugilists put on a show to shame Western promoters forever. Each match begins with the fighters making a low bow of gratitude to their teachers. Then, to the soft music of drum and flute located in a neutral corner, each arises and begins a ritual dance which identifies the name of his trainer. Then the fighters fly at each other, slashing, kicking, flailing with elbows or driving knees into groins. "With deadly and dangerous kick," ran the advance notices for one Siamese boxer in a recent bill at Rajadamnern, "his opponents are always sent down by knockout with knee." When one of the boys is knocked out, the music stops.

"Please Enter In." For quieter moments, Bangkok offers quieter delights. "Turn to your right," says the city's popular guidebook, *Black Shadow*, after listing the theaters, restaurants, nightclubs and sporting events in town, "and you will at last catch sight of the one attractive house standing magnificently in a narrow passage. This is the place of your destination. Please enter in. These young and charming girls has each her own style of love. She is, however, at your service. Charges: Ticals 50.00 and 100.00. There are many more beautiful ones but with higher charges." The visitor, diffident at entering this place, may find courage in remembering that just across the street from Bangkok's Central Police Station stands the Buddhist Temple of the Fruits of Prostitution, a legacy from a departed lady bountiful.

When there is nothing to do in Bangkok, the Siamese give a party. Anything will do as an excuse—a new door for an old house, a new pot for the kerosene stove, or the casting of a new Buddha. Practically no one in Siam casts his own Buddha any

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more, of course, but since it would be unthinkable to buy or sell an image of the great god, the Siamese "rent" the Buddha from a store on a lifetime lease, and hold a casting party anyway.

Or the party may move to one of Bangkok's many Chinese restaurants, every one of which has exactly 384 dishes listed on the menu. This 384 is not a mystic Sino-Siamese number—it derives simply from the fact that all the restaurants patronize the same printer. Most of them have 20-odd dishes on hand, and if the customer can't have what he orders, *mai ben rai*. And there is beer from all over the world: Mexico's Tecate, America's



PHIBUN SONGGRAM
Two out of five coups.

Pabst, Germany's Klosterbräu, Denmark's Carlsberg.

Bangkok's nightclubs are currently in the grip of a new dance craze. The *ram-wong* has spread to Hong Kong, Singapore, Manila, and experts say it will hit the U.S. soon. It is a modernization of an ancient dance, in which couples curve back their fingers, spin and weave about each other, but never touch. King Phumiphon should love it.

What with all the diversion (and very good business), Bangkok's colony of Westerners has doubled since prewar days, now numbers 1,200, including 400 Americans. Foreigners love Siam. Caricaturist Al Hirschfeld was entranced until he met with a painful accident. A doctor explained that his swollen cheek was caused by a poisonous moth. "How," cried Hirschfeld, "can I tell people at home I was bitten by a moth?"

Signs of the new Westernization are everywhere. The front platforms of the streetcars are adorned with Coca-Cola signs, beneath which yellow-robed monks

ride lest they be contaminated by the presence of women inside the cars. Every tenth shop on New Street (one of the oldest thoroughfares) seems to be an X-ray shop. The Siamese are the most X-raying people in the world. They go to a doctor, then rush to have an X ray to see if the doctor guessed right.

"Everybody Is Mad." The elite of Bangkok are, of course, the princes of the blood, Phumiphon's relatives. "The monarchy," explained Prince Chumphot the other day, "renewed itself by losing its members in the common people." Thanks to the enterprise and fertility of the Chakri kings, Bangkok crawls with literally thousands of princes. They work as grocery-store salesmen, government clerks and peddlers.

There was squat little Prince Bhanuphan, for instance, the King's first cousin, playwright, publisher and collector of automobiles, who could be spotted almost any day in downtown Bangkok denouncing the city's traffic system to some long-suffering cop and screaming, "Everybody, absolutely everybody is mad." There was Bhanuphan's brother, easygoing Prince Chaloemphon, by all odds the most popular cop on Bangkok's force, who by dint of hard study during 15 years of service had managed to rise from police sublieutenant to captain. The coolies have a name for him: Cheerful. He can generally be found seated at some roadside eating place, his cop's cap pushed well back on his head, amiably arguing with a group of *samlor* (pedicab) boys about the best strains of fighting fish. Chaloemphon is also one of the Orient's outstanding authorities on orchid culture. Other high-ranking Siamese royalty teach school, produce movies, publish newspapers and sell advertising. To refuse to buy an ad from Princess Mayurachat is almost useless; she prints the ad anyway and promptly sends her bill whether you like it or not. Nobody likes to be in debt to a princess.

Tweedledhi & Tweedlebum. Far more powerful than any prince (including King Phumiphon) are Siam's two master politicians, Pridhi and Phibun. Since 1932 Siam has had four constitutions and five attempted coups, of which two were successful. Pridhi, a scholar, wrote three of the four constitutions, and Phibun, a schemer, pulled both of the successful coups.

Phibun, as Premier, cooperated with the Japanese during the war. To get Pridhi out of the way he kicked him upstairs as regent for young King Ananda. Pridhi collaborated with the Allies, and in the last days of the war Bangkok had more undercover OSS men than could be found in the bar of Washington's Willard Hotel.

After the war Pridhi became Premier and Phibun retired. But soon Phibun started showing up every afternoon at the kite-flying ground. Friends interpreted this as a sign he was back in politics. Ananda's death brought Scholar Pridhi's

fall, and Schemer Phibun becoming C-in-C of the army, Pridhi fled into exile. Now that Phibun has recognized Indo-China's Bao Dai, some say Pridhi will make a deal with Indo-China's Communist Ho Chi Minh. Others say Pridhi will come back as Phibun's Foreign Minister. But all these matters are in the laps of the astrologers.

The Yak's Tail. More certain is King Phumiphon's immediate future. Last week, when the first rush of parades, pageants and military exercises attending his arrival were done, King Phumiphon embarked on the elaborate six-day ceremony of his brother's cremation. Next



PRIDHI BANOMYONG
Three out of four constitutions.

month, in full panoply and regalia, he himself will be seated on the great Octagonal Throne of figwood beneath the seven-tiered White Umbrella of State to receive into his own hands and place on his own head the crown of Siam. As fanfares sound and drums roll, the High Priest of Siva will then put into his hands one by one the great White Umbrella of State, the Brahman Girdle, the Golden Tablet of Style and Title, the Great Crown of Victory, the Scepter, the Girdle of Brilliance, the Girdle of the Nine Gems, the Sword of Victory, the Fan, the Whisk of a Yak's Tail, the Whisk of a White Elephant's Tail, the Slippers, the Stick, the Diamond Ring, the Ring, the Personal Sword, the Receptacle, the Betelnut Set, the Water Urn, the Libation Vessel, the Hostage Sword, the Discus, the Trident, the Diamond Spear, the Long-Handled Sword, the Sword and Buckler, the Bow and the Gun of the Satong.

Then the King of Siam will rise and give his first royal command: "Trust me and be at ease."



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(First Amendment, U. S. Constitution)

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