

## Southeast Asia by Sophie Tanapura

### What Zaitsev packed in his bags

*A dangerous combination: As the United States gears up trade war against Asia, Moscow woos Thailand with trade deals.*

On the heels of U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, the Soviets are moving full swing into Southeast Asia. Where the United States lacks concrete proposals, Moscow is trying to fill the vacuum. That characterizes the end-of-July trip made by Anatoli Zaitsev, head of the Soviet Southeast Asia Affairs Bureau, to the region. From Singapore, Zaitsev arrived in Bangkok on July 24, and left for Burma and Malaysia on July 28.

Compared to the last trip here by Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Kapitsa, Zaitsev—in line with the style of the new Soviet party secretary in Gucci shoes so admired by Maggie Thatcher—adopted a smooth-talking approach more to the liking of the Southeast Asians. But no one, it seemed, was duped into thinking that Soviet foreign policy had shifted from the basic aim of expanding their influence in the region while the United States is being edged out.

During his four days in Bangkok, Zaitsev tried to impress upon the Thais how important Thailand was to the Soviet Union. Bilateral talks were emphasized without ever apparently bringing up the United States or China.

Earlier in July, before the 18th ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting in Kuala Lumpur, George Shultz embraced the Khmer resistance and met with the non-communist leaders of the Son Sann and Sihanouk factions, and gave vague promises of U.S. assistance. U.S. backing for the ASEAN proximity talks proposal was extracted from Shultz only after an hour-long

discussion with Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savestila at the ASEAN Kuala Lumpur meeting.

ASEAN policymakers are finding it increasingly difficult to assess U.S. foreign policy intentions. This task became more exasperating, many have told us, when the U.S. Congress recently voted up a 10% cut in aid to Indochinese refugees, from \$377.68 million to \$292.95 million—hardly a friendly gesture toward an old ally like Thailand that bears the heaviest burden for the refugees. Secretary General Prasong Soonsiri of the Thai National Security Council had said at a Bangkok conference on the refugee problem that should Thailand not receive sufficient international aid, “the problem may have to be dealt with in her own way.” There are reports that Thailand may consider repatriating Khmer refugees to “safe areas” in Kampuchea.

When asked about Vietnamese reports that the Soviets had doubled their aid to Vietnam, Zaitsev only commented that the calculation method used was different, intimating that the Soviet aid was quite a bit less than Vietnam says.

Back in Bangkok for a meeting at the foreign ministry, Asda Jayanama, Thai ambassador to Hanoi, revealed to the local press that Vietnamese officials, despite official statements, were, in private, uneasy about the recent thaw between the Soviets and the People's Republic of China.

For Thailand, and for ASEAN as a whole, the test of Soviet sincerity is

what role they might play in bringing peace and stability in the region, especially by ceasing to support Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea. But this is a far-fetched possibility, given the Soviet strategy for a global showdown with the United States by 1988.

Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Kapitsa, in his talk in Indonesia last April, made it clear that Vietnam was not going to pull out of Kampuchea until 1989, when the Heng Samrin government will have tightened its hold over Kampuchea. Apparently, the Indonesian scholars visiting Hanoi in February 1985 were given the same timetable.

Meanwhile, Soviet strategy is to woo Thailand into developing bilateral relations, in both trade and cultural exchanges. Thailand so far enjoys a trade surplus with the Soviet Union in two-way trade since 1979. Last year, Thailand had a trade surplus of about 1.6 billion baht with exports of maize, tapioca, raw sugar, fluorite mineral and textile products. During Deputy Foreign Minister Kapitsa's April trip, a 500,000-ton tapioca deal was signed with the Thai government, estimated at 22 million U.S. dollars. Apparently over the years, there have also been sports exchanges; this year Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet will perform in Bangkok with assistance from the Bangkok Bank.

The expansion of trade with Moscow contrasts dangerously with the protectionist spirit of the Jenkins bill, designed to shelter American textiles from cheaper Asian products. Thailand feels that the Jenkins bill will jeopardize her expected export earnings from textiles. Numerous questions are being asked here in the region: Who's boss—the White House or Congress? Has the United States, by cutting refugee aid and conducting trade war against her allies, decided to abandon her friends to her enemies?