Chapter IV

MALAYA AND SIAM

The youngest of the nations,

A spacious far-flung land,

Besides the Ancient Kingdoms

Australia takes her stand.

- W.M. FLEMING, Australian poet.
While the scene in Southeast Asia was crowded with the happenings in Indonesia, developments were taking place in Malaya, which, though ignored in the beginning, were ultimately to lead to the peace-time stationing of the Australian troops in the area.

Though they represented different cultures and modes of thought, the British rule had been their common heritage. In fact, the British settlement in Malaya had preceded that of Sydney only by some seventeen months. Its strategic importance to Australia was heightened, when, during the noontide of the British Empire, work was started on a vast dockyard and massive naval installations in Singapore. Major-General Gordon-Bennett, Commander of the Australian force in Malaya before the war, was not being formal, when he said in reply to the welcome speech of Governor Sir Shenton Thomas:

Australians regard Singapore as an outpost of Australia. We feel that in helping to defend this country, we are defending Australia ... To the people of Malaya I say that your war will be our war. Should any enemy come this way, Australia will be there. (1)

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However, to use Sir Winston Churchill's phrase, the Singapore Base, proved "a battleship without a bottom". As we have seen, it came too late in the imperial day and amid too much dissention to claim a hallowed place in history.

Even before the war, Malaya was important enough to Australia to warrant the appointment of a diplomatic representative in Singapore - Australia's first in Southeast Asia. At the time, informed opinion in Australia demanded the strengthening of the country's direct representation in Singapore. The *Sydney Morning Herald* complained that Australia had ministers in Tokio and Chungking, but only a Representative in Singapore. (2) The defeat of the Allies and the brutal murder of Bowden, the Australian Representative, at the hands of the Japanese, put an abrupt end to this little of Australian diplomatic activity in Southeast Asia. When, after the war, Mountbatten set up his South-East Asia Command Headquarters in Singapore, an Australian officer (Mr Proud) was attached to it. The status of the Representative was raised to that of Commissioner in 1946 and Claude Massey took over as the first Australian Commissioner in Malaya on 13 March. (3) A Trade Commissioner was also appointed next year.

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2 See ibid., p.3.

3 It was, however, not until 31 August 1957 that the first High Commissioner to an independent Malaya was
The British proclaimed Emergency in Malaya in 1948, which continued up to July 1960. This step was taken at a time, when there were rumblings of Revolution in Southeast Asia. The upsurge was basically nationalist, though, at times, there was a strong Communist element in it. The Government of Ben Chifley went through the jungle of Asian Revolution with only their pragmatism for a guide. Though they scanned the Asian horizon with their own telescope, the ALP and its leaders could not clearly distinguish between genuine civil strife and Communist insurgency and this affected their attitude to the British proclamation of emergency in Malaya.

As a result of the increase in Communist insurgency, Malaya suffered heavy losses in men and materials. The production of tin declined (4) and considerable public expenditure – almost over a third of normal revenue – was diverted to measures against the terrorists. (5) All these things did not pass unnoticed in Australia. The Australians of all shades agreed that

appointed by Australia. Thomas Kingston Critchley, who was Commissioner since 1951 and whose distinguished part in the Indonesian imbroglio has been described in the last Chapter, was the first High Commissioner for Australia in Malaya and remained on the post for a long time.


5 Ibid., p.81.
Malaya was their first line of defence. Chifley, however, was not in favour of sending troops to the area. To him, it was an upsurge of nationalism - a rebellion against conditions under which the people were living. (6) Members of the ALP blamed the British and the British settlers for the situation in the peninsula and criticised them for it. (7) The Leader of the LCP: Opposition, on the other hand, advocated the despatch of arms and also troops to Malaya, even if the strife was due to economic reasons. He felt that economic standards could be improved if there was internal security in the colony. Thus, by sending troops, Australia would supply the means of livelihood as well as defence. (8) Spender discerned the hand of Communists and declared:

... We cannot but view with alarm the possibility of Russia making a thrust down through the Malayan archipelago to the very fringes of Australia. (9)

Despite the initial reluctance of the Government, public opinion in Australia came round to the view that, in the interest of her imperial obligations and also of her own long-term interests, Australia should not hesitate to supply troops to Malaya. (10)

on its part, decided to send arms and munitions to Malaya on request from the British Government. (11) When the "wharfies" threatened to boycott the loading of supplies bound for Malaya, the Labour Government used their own influence with the workers in scotching the move. In addition, the Government supplied free gifts of food, drugs and equipment to Malaya. Three mobile units from Australia went to Malaya in December 1948 to help in the distribution of the gifts. (12)

**ANZAM**

A significant achievement of the Labour Government was the creation of the ANZAM, which was the first post-war attempt at securing, on a regional basis, a considerable segment of Southeast Asia. On 15 May 1945, Prime Minister Chifley gave the first indication of its being formed through a radio broadcast. (13) He told his listeners that the Government was engaged in developing

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10 See, for example, the editorial of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 July 1948. Also see the editorials in *Perth West Australian*, 27 July 1948 and *Brisbane Courier Mail*, 28 July 1948.

11 Levi, n.9, p. 192.

12 Through these, 205,000 people were fed and 50,000 clothed till the units closed down in June 1946. *Singapore Free Press*(Singapore), 18 November 1946. Cited in Yeow, n.1, p.24.

"a common scheme of defence between Britain, Australia and New Zealand", which, he believed, might later emerge as the nucleus for the contemplated Pacific Pact. The ANZAM was, however, neither a pact nor an organization. It was a typical Anglo-Saxon "arrangement", the nature, scope and documentary basis of which have never been made clear, at least to the public. It is, of course, a body of staff officers from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. They informally meet off and on to hold consultations on the defence problems pertaining to the ANZAM area, which includes Australia, New Zealand and the former British possessions of Malaya and Borneo, together with adjacent sea areas. (14) A Chatham House study (15) has pointed out that planning under the ANZAM is limited to the defence of sea and air communications and co-ordination at Service level and does not include firm commitment by the Governments concerned. Despite so many changes in the melting pot of Southeast Asia, this unique arrangement has continued until now. As to its value, "... the ANZAM", asserts an Indian study, "ensured, even though temporarily, Australia's northern territories against threats from the north."(16)

15 Ibid.
Malaya and the LCP Government

Landslide victory at the polls in December 1949 put the Liberal-Country Party coalition, led by Menzies, at the helm. Australian conservatives and their leader had now an opportunity to practice what they had prescribed, though in vain, while in opposition. Thus it was the new Menzies Government that established the principle of sending military aid to Malaya in 1950. (17) It showed, as Prof. Harper has pointed out, that Malaya had now become the pivot of Australian defence and the Australians felt relieved, with implicit British consent, of their traditional share in the defence of the Middle East. (18)

On 21 April 1950, the Prime Minister disclosed that the British Government had sought Australian aid in coping up with the terrorists in Malaya. (19) Events then moved fast. Malcolm MacDonald, Commissioner-General for the United Kingdom in Southeast Asia, came to Canberra for discussions in May. In the same month, Menzies told the Parliament that Australia must be prepared to take part in the defence of Malaya and that the Government was considering ways and means to do so. (20) On 31 May came

17 Barcan, n.6, p. 21.
another announcement that Britain had asked for some air support and servicing facilities for the Royal Air Force in Australia and that Canberra was going to meet the British request. (21)

Australian air support to the British in Malaya comprised two squadrons - a Transport Squadron of Dakotas and another of Lincoln bombers. The first arrived in May 1950 and, stationed at Changi, it remained in Malaya until its transfer to Korea in December 1952. The bomber squadron, which had seen service in Malaya in 1941, came in July and, kept in Tanglin, it remained in Malaya for eight years. Both gave a creditable account of themselves. (22)

Though the Opposition remained critical of the moves to send the "diggers" to Malaya again and described the difficulties there as "civil disturbance", (23) the people in general supported the efforts to help the British in Malaya. Public Opinion Polls clearly showed that a majority of Australian public was in favour of

21 Barcan, n.6, pp. 19-20.
22 For 2½ years, the Transport Squadron dropped 1,669,793 lbs. of supplies to the troops in the jungle. The Lincoln bombers dropped 85% of the total weight of bombs that had been delivered into the Malayan jungle during their eight years' service. They eliminated terrorists, such as, Goh Peng Tuan and Tan Foo Loong. For this and other details, see Yeow, n.1, pp. 30-31.
the despatch of a volunteer contingent to Malaya. (24) The executive of the Returned Servicemen's League also urged the Government to actively participate in the defence of Malaya. (25) In August 1954, there was a rumour in Malayan Press that the "diggers" were to come to augment the British and the Gurkhas but the Australian Minister for Defence denied it. (26) In December, the Government admitted that Prime Minister Menzies would discuss the possibility with Churchill. It was, however, not until 1955 that ground and naval support was provided by Australia to the British in Malaya in addition to the air support extended during the period under review. Australia's peace-time military commitment in Malaya (and, later, in Malaysia) has continued ever since.

SIAM : A FORGOTTEN TREATY

Siam (27) did not figure much in the policies of Australia in their early formative period, except for a minor episode.

27 Siam is the name given to the kingdom by the foreigners. In the language of the people, it is "Muang Thai" (that is, Thailand or "the land of the free"). The name Thailand was adopted between June 1939 and April 1946, after which it became Siam, until April 1949, when it again became Thailand and has been used as such in this study in the following Chapters.
At the outbreak of the war in the Pacific, approximately eight Australian-owned tin mines were operating in the south of Siam and there were some Australian residents there, most of them living on the mines. When the Japanese forces entered the kingdom in December 1941, the Siamese, after a minor resistance, "welcomed" them in. Traditionally, "a barometer of power shifts in Asia", the kingdom concluded an agreement of collaboration and later of alliance with Nippon. Having aligned themselves, at least de facto, with Japan, the Siamese Government formally declared war against Britain. Following Commonwealth practice at that time, Australia also issued a declaration of war against Siam, to which the latter made no formal response.

On declaring war on Britain, the Siamese interned most of the British subjects in the country, including those of the Australians, who had not managed to escape. All the British and Australian tin mines were taken under the control of the Department of Mines and such of the belongings of the Australian (and other British) residents as had survived looting were taken charge of by some sort of Siamese Controller of Enemy Property. The internees remained under camp detention until the end of the war.

Though the kingdom of Siam bent like a reed before the powerful winds of Nippon, there remained a sullen hostility for the intruder in the country and a resistance (known as Free Thai movement) was organized against Japan.
The fall of Tojo in Japan on 21 July 1944 was reflected in Bangkok by the collapse, three days later, of the Government of Marshal Pibul Songgram (Luang Pibun). A pro-Western group, led by Pridi Banomyong (Luang Pradit Manudharm) then came to the fore, with Pridi as Regent for the absentee monarch and one of his friends as prime minister.

On 16 August 1945, Bangkok broadcast withdrawal of declaration of war against Britain and America and a desire to restore good relations with both, as had existed before the Japanese onslaught. Two days later, the National Assembly in Bangkok passed a resolution affirming that Siam would revert to customary neutrality. A Siamese mission then visited the headquarters of the South-East Asia Command in Kandy (Ceylon). There they were asked to immediately accept military occupation of the country and also a political settlement, obviously to be prescribed by Mountbatten's Command. Over the second, the Siamese demurred and, in this, they were supported by American officers of the SEAC as well as the US State Department. (28) It was at last decided that Indian and British troops would be flown into Siam for military occupation of the country, while the political settlement would be decided later. The occupation was a smooth affair, as there was

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no civil strife as witnessed by the occupation forces in Dutch East Indies and French Indo-China.

After the Japanese surrender, a Siamese delegation led by Prince Viwat made feelers to Sir Esler Dennin\(^{g}\) (then Mr Denning), Political Adviser to the Supreme Commander, for political settlement. At this stage, Australia was also associated with the negotiations. Col. A. J. Eastman (at present High Commissioner for Australia in Kuala Lumpur) was then on Mountbatten's staff and he was authorized to take part in the talks on behalf of Australia. M.S. Aney also participated as Indian representative.

The negotiations, which followed, were indeed very delicate but there is very little on record. The Australians, Indians and Siamese, who conducted them at that time, later became prominent in public life and in academic and diplomatic spheres of their respective countries.\(^{(29)}\) The Siamese pressed the other side for restoring normal peaceful relations unconditionally and without reparations. They argued that their declaration of war against Britain in January 1942 was merely a formal

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\(^{(29)}\) To some of them, this writer is indebted for part of the information in this section, which was obtained through interviews and correspondence with them. However, their desire to remain anonymous has been duly respected.
act taken under the Japanese duress for saving their country from destruction and forcible military occupation; that at no time, did they fight any British forces; (30) that internment of the British and Australian citizens under humane Siamese guards saved them from a much worse fate at Japanese hands; (31) that the Thai take-over of Australian and other mines served a similar purpose; that Government co-operation with the Japanese was nominal and reluctant and that the Thai underground resistance movement led by Pridi Banomyong had co-operated usefully with the Allies during the last year or two of the war. (32) What was surprising for the Australians was that the Siamese insisted that their declaration of war was directed against Britain only and that they had never heard of the Commonwealth convention (that is, when Britain was at war, Australia was also at war) and that they were really amazed to discover a state of war existing between their country and Australia.

30 This claim was perhaps open to question as, according to Fifield, Siamese had actually participated in the invasion of the Shan States (Kengtung and Mongpan) of Burma. For this, see Russel H. Fifield, The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia, 1945-1958 (New York, 1958), p. 237.

31 This was perhaps correct. See the Sydney Morning Herald, 12 September 1945 for the report that the Australian prisoners in Siam were indeed found to be in high spirits and mostly physically fit.

32 For a support to this view, see ibid, 10 September 1945. According to its report, the Regent was aided by the Premier and the Chief of Police in his secret resistance to the Japanese. His code name was "Ruth", which
Among the counter-arguments were the facts that the declaration of war was, even on their own account, a gratuitous and unnecessary act of hostility; that the arrest and internment of the British and the Australians had deprived them of real opportunity to escape from the country; that the mines had suffered serious neglect and depredations while under Siamese control; that the Siamese had permitted extensive looting by their citizens of the property of British and Australian residents, before it was taken over by an appropriate Government authority, and that a lot of the surviving property had evaporated unaccountably while under their control. Furthermore, if the Siamese did not consider themselves at war with Australia, their internment of Australian citizens and seizure of their property had even less justification.

Britain, Australia and India, therefore, insisted that termination of the state of war should be on a number of conditions. The main condition was that the Siamese Government should pay compensation for the loss and damage of British-Australian-Indian property (both the mines and other industrial and commercial properties, and also personal belongings) and should also compensate internees for their arrest, internment and losses. The British also insisted separately on the free supply of $1$ million tons

*As used by British and American Governments in their regular communications.*
of rice. (33) from the substantial stocks in the kingdom. It was to be used for famine relief in Southeast Asia (particularly, Malaya and the Philippines) and China through the Combined Food Board, Washington. The British Indian and Australian representatives signed the agreement on 1 January 1946 in Government House, Singapore. On the same day, preliminary letters of agreement for the termination of the state of war were exchanged between Australia and Siam. After this, negotiations were carried on by Keith Officer, the new Australian Political Representative attached to Mountbatten's staff. These resulted in Treaty of Peace between Siam and Australia, signed in Bangkok on 3 April 1946.

Separately from all this, Australia and Britain discussed with Siam some arrangements for the rehabilitation of the tin mines, which, they pointed out, would be of advantage to both sides. Agreement was reached that the Siamese should make a rehabilitation advance (reportedly of about £2 million) to get the mines going again without waiting for the assessment of individual claims for compensation. The latter task proved difficult. Ultimately the Siamese, at their own initiative, paid in about May 1950 an overall lump sum of something like £6 million, of which the Australian share was something over £1 million.
The peace treaty with Thailand can easily be bracketed with the forgotten treaties of history. Technically, it ended a state of war between the two countries, but it is doubtful if it has any other significance for Thai-Australian relations today. Siam's acceptance of the obligation to co-operate in security arrangements in Southeast Asia, envisaged in the peace settlement, was in fact a tribute to her strategic position, as revealed during the war. This reference to regional security was also in line with Evatt's repeated emphasis on the subject. It was in the next decade that the kingdom of Siam (later renamed as Thailand) joined Britain and Australia in a regional security pact, with headquarters at Bangkok's Raj Damnern Avenue.