

150 years of diplomatic relations

The establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Denmark and Thailand date back to 21st of May 1858 when the “Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation” was signed by H.M. King Frederik VII of Denmark, H.M. King Mongkut of Siam and H.M. King Pinklao of Siam.

The introductory lines of the treaty state:

“There shall be constant peace and perpetual friendship, between his Majesty the King of Denmark, his Heirs and Successors on the one part, and their Majesties the First and Second Kings of Siam, their Heirs and Successors on the other part, as well as between the Subjects of both States, without exception of persons and places.”

This statement has been the epitome of relations between Denmark and Thailand until today, 150 years later.

The initiation of the diplomatic relations by the treaty was the culmination of commercial relations between Danish and Thai traders since the beginning of the 17th century. The first recorded commercial contact between Denmark and Thailand dates back to 1620 when the Danish Vessel “Copenhagen” called on the port of Tenasserim with greetings from the Prince of Tanjore. The following years, a lively trade flourished between the small Danish territory Trankebar in Tanjore - in what is now the southeastern State of Tamil Nadu in India, and Tenasserim.

The first Danish diplomats in Thailand

As one of the first results of the treaty, Denmark in 1860 established a consulate in Bangkok. The first Danish consul in Thailand was Frederick Carl Christian Købke, a former captain on a large Siamese bark and Inspector in the Siamese Customs Administration. Thailand did not utilize its right to diplomatic representation until 1882 when H.S.H Prince Prisdang was appointed ambassador to Denmark.

Consul Købke took care of all his duties with great diligence in the coming years. When Købke in 1875 introduced the newly arrived Andreas de Richelieu to H.M. King Chulalongkorn, a new era of Danish-Thai relations and cooperation was also introduced. Richelieu was assigned to the Thai navy and soon became a highly esteemed advisor and friend of H.M. King Chulalongkorn. Richelieu was appointed Admiral and leader of the Thai Navy, but also took active part in many aspects of H.M. King Chulalongkorn’s modernization of Thailand such as establishing electricity supply as well as tram- and railways. For his lifelong contribution to Danish-Thai relations, Richelieu received high honours from both countries as Knight of Dannebrog and the Grand Cross of the White Elephant.

Richelieu was a great facilitator for attracting entrepreneurial Danes to Thailand. Soon a large community of Danish businessmen, doctors, scientists, military men and sailors was established

in Thailand. One outstanding figure was H.N. Andersen, who also made a career in the Thai army before turning into a very influential businessman. Andersen established the trading company Andersen & Co. later known as The East Asiatic Company, one of the leaders in East Asian trade, shipping and industry with large investments in Thailand.

Modernisation of the diplomatic relations

In 1925 the treaty of 1858 was revised as part of Thailand's attempt to reform the unfavourable terms on extraterritoriality in legal matters under the treaties with especially France and Britain. In 1937 a new treaty was agreed upon, abolishing all extraterritorial rights with ready cooperation from the Danish side.

The 1949 government agreement concerning air navigation created the basis for the later Thai-Danish cooperation to establish Thai Airways International, a joint venture between the national Scandinavian airline SAS and the Thai domestic carrier Thai Airways Company.

In the middle of the 1950's, Denmark established its first embassy in Thailand. Gunnar Seidenfaden, already a prominent diplomat at that time, was nominated ambassador. By promoting technical and economic cooperation between Denmark and Thailand, Seidenfaden succeeded in furthering and deepening the traditionally good relations.

Less aid, more cooperation

In 1961 an agreement concerning technical cooperation on dairy farming was concluded. This agreement indicated the beginning of Thai-Danish cooperation with the intention of advancing the development of the Thai economy by means of Danish technical and economic aid. In the coming years several agreements on technical cooperation in fields such as forestry and marine biology were signed.

Up till today this development cooperation has expanded into in many fields. The cooperation is now being phased out at a time when Thailand has become a prosperous middle-income country, itself now an aid donor to less developed countries.

Today, prevailing treaties between Denmark and Thailand concern inter alia taxation, extradition, loans and aviation. The introductory lines of the original 1858 treaty still apply to full extent in Danish-Thai relations.