

## Thai troops 'cross into Cambodia'

**About 40 Thai troops have crossed into Cambodian territory in the latest flare-up of a dispute over an ancient temple, Cambodian officials have said.**

The head of the national authority for the Preah Vihear temple said there was a stand-off, but had been no shooting.

Thai military officials said soldiers had been deployed on Thai territory nearby "to protect our sovereignty".

Earlier, three Thai protesters were arrested for illegally crossing the border in an attempt to enter the site.

The 11th-Century Hindu temple and the land around it have been the subject of a border dispute for decades.

### 'Misunderstanding'

The head of the agency in charge of the temple site, Hang Soth, said the Thai soldiers had positioned themselves at a Buddhist pagoda located on a mountain slope below and were now negotiating with the Cambodian authorities.

**There is no trespassing by our soldiers**

Seni Chittakasem  
Governor of Si Sa Ket Province

"At first about 20 troops entered a pagoda in Cambodian territory. Later they increased their numbers to about 40," he told the AFP news agency. "We don't understand yet why they came."

Hang Soth said that Cambodian troops in the area had been placed on alert but ordered not to open fire first, and that there had not been any shooting.

Thai officials later denied their troops had entered Cambodian soil.

The regional Thai army commander, Maj-Gen Kanok Netakawesana, said they were on Thai territory close to the disputed area.

"We have every right to deploy troops here to protect our sovereignty," he told the Associated Press.

The governor of the neighbouring Thai province of Si Sa Ket, Seni Chittakasem, insisted there had been a misunderstanding.

"There is no trespassing by our soldiers," he said.

The Preah Vihear temple was awarded to Cambodia by the International Court of Justice in 1962, forcing Thai troops who had occupied the area to withdraw.

It then became caught up in Cambodia's civil conflict, falling to the Khmer Rouge in 1975 and only being opened to the public in 1998.

The dispute has escalated since Cambodia applied for World Heritage status for the temple, which was granted by Unesco this month.

The application was endorsed by Thai Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama, but this caused controversy in Thailand and he resigned last week after a court ruled he had breached the constitution.

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## Thailand foreign minister quits

**Thai Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama has resigned after a top court ruled he had violated the constitution by signing a deal over a disputed temple.**

Cambodia had been petitioning to have the temple on the Thai-Cambodian border listed as a World Heritage site.

But judges ruled the government should not have backed Cambodia without asking parliament, as the temple is built on land disputed by the two countries.

Some Thais saw the move as an implicit surrender of sovereignty claims.

The Preah Vihear Hindu temple, near the Thai-Cambodian border, was awarded Unesco World Heritage status on Monday.

### Assertive courts

Mr Noppadon made the announcement that he was stepping down on national television.



"But I insist that I have done nothing wrong. I have not sold out the country. I love Thailand, and would not cause any damage to the country," he said, fighting back tears.

"I want to see national reconciliation. In order for the government to continue working to solve the country's problems, I resign."

Always a controversial choice as foreign minister - he used to be a lawyer for former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted in a military coup in 2006 - Mr Noppadon's position became untenable after backing the Unesco World Heritage bid.

His support for the temple's listing sparked a wave of nationalist anger, and matters were made worse when the Constitutional Court ruled two days ago that the minister's actions had violated the constitution.

Mr Noppadon is the second minister to resign from Thailand's embattled government, and according to the BBC's South East Asia correspondent Jonathan Head, he may well not be the last.

Another minister resigned in May over allegations he had insulted the king.

The constitutional court, one of the country's top three judicial bodies, also disqualified the health minister from office this week.

The courts have become unusually assertive in punishing government officials for what in the past might have been viewed as minor offences, our correspondent says.

The role of the judiciary was strengthened by the new constitution, which was drafted under military rule last year, so it could act as a check on the power of elected governments.

As prime minister, Mr Thaksin was often accused of abusing his power - a principal reason given to justify the coup that ousted him.

The coalition government now led by his allies risks being crippled by these repeated judicial interventions, our correspondent adds.

The 900-year-old Hindu temple has been the subject of a border dispute for decades.

The International Court of Justice ruled in 1962 that it belonged to Cambodia and has been at the centre of a bitter dispute between the two neighbours ever since.

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