

Saigonese React With Relief, Skepticism and Fear

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 24—South Vietnamese greeted President Nguyen Van Thieu's announcement today of a cease-fire agreement with an ambivalent mixture of skepticism, relief and, for many, fear. There were no celebrations, no singing in the streets for the war-weary residents of Saigon—only business as usual.

"I was happy this morning when I heard there will be a cease-fire," said an elderly man who lives in a noisome slum built over the garbage-strewn banks of the Saigon River. "At least some of the killing will stop."

"But we are no longer innocent," added the man, a former lumber dealer whose hometown in the countryside was overrun by the Communists last spring. "The war will go on some other way."

An experienced Vietnamese journalist, who is a refugee from North Vietnam, was even more pessimistic.

"It is peace, but what kind of peace?" he said. "I'm afraid the Communists have got their Trojan horse inside South Vietnam."

Demonstrations Barred

One possible reason that there were no celebrations today was that President Thieu specifically ordered the police to break up any public demonstrations for fear they might be organized by the Communists, a ranking official said. The official said that the Government fully expects some street demonstrations to be organized by the Communists over the weekend, when the cease-fire goes into effect.

In his speech, President Thieu insisted that the North Vietnamese has been "smashed" militarily and had been forced to "recognize that the South and the North are two separate nations."

But at the same time, voicing the fear of many Vietnamese, the accord was "only a cease-fire agreement, no more and no less," and not yet the beginning of real peace. Like President Nixon, Mr. Thieu provided no details of the accord, but

he said he would make another address later in the week.

Well-informed American officials said that they expected Mr. Thieu to speak on Saturday. They expect that he will outline new 24-hour-a-day curfew that might last for the first three days of the cease-fire.

Rumors of an impending closing of shops, markets and restaurants in a curfew had one of the day's few visible effects on Saigonese, as people stocked up on rice, canned meat and cooking oil.

"This is terrible," Mrs. Nguyen Thi Hanh, a housewife, remarked as she loaded her plastic shopping basket with expensive foreign canned goods. "What is Thieu doing to us now—peace, curfews? How can we take care of our families?"

In the only other apparent reaction to the accord here today, hundreds of hastily produced banners were put up along the streets to welcome the cease-fire.

"We all happily welcome the cease-fire, but we must be alert," one of the banners proclaimed.

More Paterols in City

Several extra battalions of military police paterolled the city checking the identification papers of young men, particularly those in uniform. And security police in Da Nang yesterday arrested 36 suspected Vietcong personnel, a police spokesman said.

A leader of the political opposition expressed mixed feeling over the accord.

"I am happy and worried at the same time," said Tran Van Tuyen, a National Assembly Deputy and Catholic opposition leader. "Within the next few days there will be no more killing and no more destruction, at least for a while. But I am worried because there is still no political solution."

"What will happen after the last U.S. troops have gone home?" Mr. Tuyen asked. "We are entering the period of political struggle in a very weak posture. Mr. Thieu has not achieved national solidarity."

Shortly after recording his radio address this morning, Mr. Thieu met with leaders of the Senate and the National Assembly for an hour and a half,

but, according to some of those present, he did not inform them of the details of the accord.

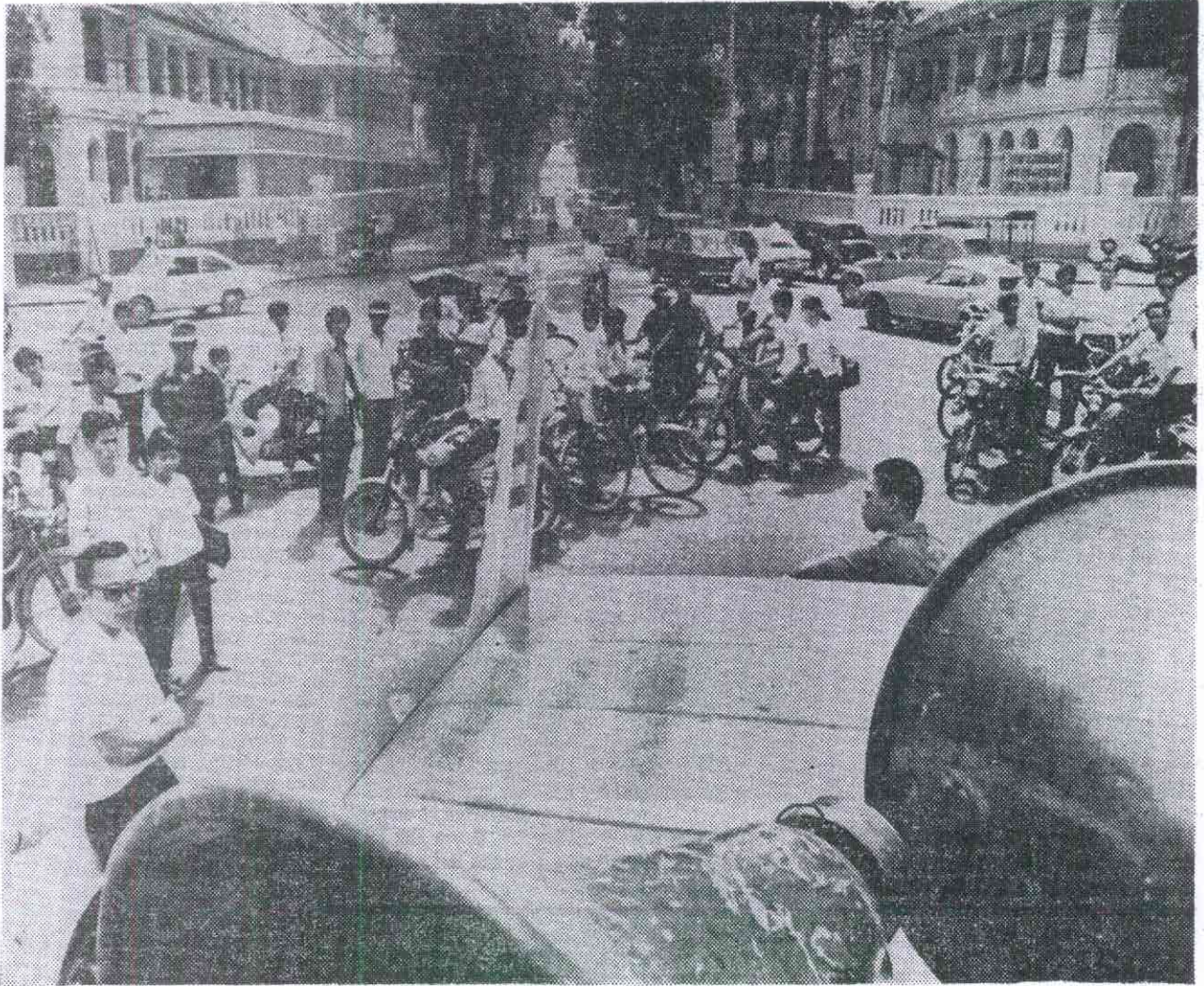
Some South Vietnamese appeared to be making plans to return to their homes in the countryside that they had had to abandon years ago. Estimates of the number of South Vietnamese forced off their land during the war run as high as eight million out of a total population of 17 million.

A woman vender in the sprawling, crowded central market said that she would "walk all the way back to My Tho" in the Mekong Delta,

about 30 miles, if the cease-fire turned out to be real.

In Mac Dinh Chi Cemetery, it was quiet today. No one came to visit two simple unmarked graves in the back of the large enclosure.

They belonged to former President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, the men who ruled South Vietnam when the war began many years ago and who were slain in a coup in 1968. Only a bunch of wilted roses on the peeling blue paint of their gravestones revealed some recent interest in them.



United Press International

Loudspeakers atop a truck brought President Thieu's speech to South Vietnamese civilians on a Saigon Street