

Saigon-Pnompenh Talks Reach Impasse

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By TAKASHI OKA

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 26 — Talks between South Vietnam and Cambodia for resumption of full diplomatic relations reached an impasse here today when the Cambodians insisted that the South Vietnamese recognize Cambodian ownership over two offshore islands.

The Cambodians also demanded, informed sources said, that Saigon accord the legal status of an ethnic minority to the approximately half a million ethnic Cambodians who live in the Mekong Delta region of South Vietnam.

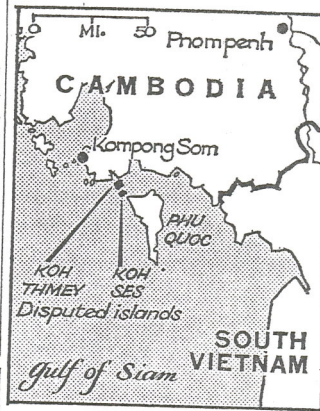
According to conference sources, the two demands, which Foreign Minister Yem Sambaur of Cambodia raised just half an hour before the scheduled signing of a preliminary agreement on renewing diplomatic ties and a news conference announcing the agreement, took the South Vietnamese by surprise. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were broken in 1963 after Cambodian charges that the South Vietnamese had violated Cambodian air space and attacked a Cambodian guard post.

Cambodians Are Adamant

The South Vietnamese suggested that both points could be taken up in future discussions, but the Cambodians insisted they would sign no document that did not include their two demands.

As a result, it is considered possible that the Cambodian Foreign Minister will leave South Vietnam tomorrow with nothing more than vague references to mutual goodwill.

The impasse is regarded as a sign of the deep-rooted suspicions underlying the surface exchange of courtesies that has marked relations between the two neighbors since the present



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rulers of Cambodia, Premier Lon Nol and the First Deputy Premier, Sisowath Sirik Matak, overthrew Prince Norodon Sihanouk as Chief of State on March 18.

The question of a military alliance between the two countries was not raised, and military questions were not a major topic of discussion, conference informants said.

Before leaving Pnompenh for Saigon yesterday, Mr. Yem Sambaur said the Cambodians were asking American troops to stay in Cambodia beyond the June deadline President Nixon has set. Today, looking grim and tense, he refused to comment on this statement as he emerged from a three-and-a-half-hour session with his South Vietnamese counterpart at the Foreign Ministry.

Nor did he comment on speculation that the Cambodians had asked South Vietnamese troops to stay on beyond the contemplated American withdrawal from Cambodia.

It appeared that instead of these primarily military questions, South Vietnamese and Cambodian negotiators here were concerned mainly with the status of their respective minorities in each other's countries.

The South Vietnamese have

been resentful of Cambodian treatment of the half million Vietnamese residents in Cambodia. The Lon Nol Government, fearing that these residents are potential subversives and supporters of North Vietnamese guerrillas and of the deposed Prince Sihanouk, has put many of them in concentration camps, from which South Vietnamese Navy ships and truck convoys have moved them to refugee centers on South Vietnamese territory.

At today's discussions, conference sources said, the Cambodians agreed to South Vietnamese proposals that the Vietnamese community in Cambodia be free to move from insecure to secure areas within the country, if the South Vietnamese Army provided the means.

Cambodians Hold Isles

At the same time, the sources said, the Cambodians insisted that South Vietnam publicly recognize their ownership over the islands of Koh Thmey and Koh Ses—known in Vietnamese as Hon Phu Du and Hon Nuoc—between the Cambodian coast and the Vietnamese island of Phu Quoc. The islands are under Cambodian administration but are claimed by the Vietnamese.

The Cambodians also demanded that the ethnic Cambodians in the delta be granted the right to claim Cambodian citizenship and to enjoy the legal status of an ethnic minority.

Last fall, the South Vietnamese Government and legislature passed a law granting ethnic minority status to the Montagnards—aboriginal hill tribesmen—and the Chams, another minority people. Ethnic Cambodians, included in the original legislation, were specifically excluded on the order of President Nguyen Van Thieu, who ruled they were full Vietnamese enjoying all the rights of citizenship.