

# Political Inertia Compounding Cambodia's

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Special to The New York Times

PNOMPENH, Cambodia, April 28—The Cambodian Government crisis, now in its ninth day, goes deeper than the surface calm of Pnompenh indicates and it is causing profound concern to diplomats interested in a stable Cambodia.

The crisis goes beyond the resignation of Premier Lon Nol and his Cabinet and the naming of a successor government. The real crisis involves the apparent inability of the restricted political circles of this country of seven million to activate the political processes by which leaders are found in a country that is a democratic republic in more than name.

What is most bewildering to diplomats and political observers is that the resignation of Gen. Lon Nol because of incapacitating illness appears to have becalmed Cambodia rather than to have provoked heightened political activity.

## Limited to Hour's Work

As a result, inertia has propelled the seriously ill Premier, who has met with no political figures since his resignation on April 20, into succeeding himself despite medical advice limiting him to one hour's light work a day for the foreseeable future.

General Lon Nol has not yet officially responded to the invitation of Chief of State Cheng Heng, made the day after the resignation, to accept a new mandate, but he has done nothing to counter the general assumption that he will accept.

Mr. Cheng Heng issued the invitation as a courtesy, ex-

pecting it to be declined with thanks. But as was the case following the ouster of Prince Norodom Sihanouk as Chief of State last year, no rival contender came forward.

The result then was that General Lon Nol, was was Premier, became by default the Prince's successor as Cambodia's chief executive.

Cambodians who held ministerial posts in the last Cabinet say apologetically that perhaps political democracy has not taken root.

## Use of Power in Doubt

A week of conversations indicate politicians' preoccupation not with who should be General Lon Nol's successor but with how power should be exercised in a Government that the ailing leader can head in name only.

In essence, the political discussion centers on how the Premier's deputy and closest associate, Lieut. Gen. Sisowath Sirik Matak, can be given the principal executive role without conferring upon him more power than other politicians trust him with.

None of the mystical trust that Cambodians place in General Lon Nol appears to have rubbed off on his deputy and friend. However, even those who criticize General Sirik Matak, who renounced his title of prince last year as being too authoritarian, concede that he brought to the post of deputy premier a high degree of efficiency.

This, together with the continuity he would provide and the important factor of the esteem that Americans have for General Sirik Matak, causes even his detractors to be pre-

pared to grant him an important position in the next government.

But like General Lon Nol, General Sirik Matak has confined himself to his residence and is limiting his political activity to waiting.

The only openly ambitious and dynamic political figure in Cambodia, Brig. Gen. In Tam, is being rejected by other politicians because he is President of the National Assembly, Governor of a province and commander of the First Mil-

## Government Crisis

tary Region and these joint roles have aroused general distrust.

The only active political center to which all factions pay close attention is the obscure Committee for Special Coordination, whose functions are vague. The head of the group is the Premier's younger brother, Lieut. Col. Lon Non.

One former Cabinet minister expressed the hope that General Sirik Matak and Colonel Lon Non would keep each other at bay and thus restrict

each other's power for the benefit of stable government.

The two foreign powers that could exercise decisive influence on the outcome of the Cabinet crisis—the United States and North Vietnam—are no more active than Cambodian politicians. Under Ambassador Emory C. Swank, the United States Embassy has

adopted a determined hands-off stance. The activities of the North Vietnamese troops have not risen during the crisis.