

Sirik Matak Turns Down Cambodian Premiership

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PNOMPENH, Cambodia, April 30 — Lieut. Gen. Sisowath Sirik declined today to form a Government, deepening Cambodia's political crisis.

The general was named yesterday as second in command of the armed forces under Gen. Lon Nol, who is incapacitated. At the same time, Chief of State Cheng Heng asked Gen. Sirik Matak to accept the premiership. But the general declined promptly in a letter that, according to informed sources, was designed to tell Mr. Cheng Heng that he was annoyed by the criticisms of him voiced in some quarters and would accept only if he was assured of being able to govern without interference from those quarters.

In a communiqué made public tonight, Mr. Cheng Heng accepted General Sirik Matak's refusal and named his personal

counselor, Chuop Hell, to try to form a cabinet.

Mr. Chuop Hell, who has served as President of the National Assembly and Ambassador to Singapore, is considered politically neutral. Cambodian political sources said that for this reason he might have a good chance of forming a government.

He is said to be in his sixties and was praised here tonight, particularly because he did not appear to be politically ambitious.

In his letter of refusal, General Sirik Matak cited two reasons that led him to refuse the Premier post while at the same time casting doubt on their validity. He said

"Public opinion is said to desire the advent of new men while I form part of the old team.

"Public opinion is said to desire that certain very difficult problems be settled in a very short time while they require considerable work be-

case of the war effort to which all of us must dedicate ourselves."

The general's allusions were to criticisms contained in declarations issued by circles close to Lieut. Col. Lon Non, the younger brother of the resigning Premier, that implicitly accused the last Government of responsibility for the increase of corruption and of a lack of competence in dealing with Cambodia's wartime problems.

Such criticism is understood to be aimed particularly at General Sirik Matak, who, as Deputy Premier, took responsibility for the civil tasks of the Government while General Lon Nol devoted all his time to the conduct of the war, until he suffered a stroke in February.

Only this morning the student organization close to Colonel Lon Non repeated its criticisms, although it did not mention General Sirik Matak by name. This action may have played a role in the general's

decision to refuse the office. General Sirik Matak's letter of refusal was transmitted after he met for more than an hour this morning with General Lon Nol. There was speculation tonight that General Sirik Matak had not been given assurances that General Lon Nol would temper his brother's political activities.

Although Colonel Lon Non declined to comment on the latest developments, the naming of Generals Lon Nol and Sirik Matak yesterday to carry on as chiefs of the war effort was believed to meet the minimum conditions of the colonel and his military friends. They had made it plain at the outset of the crisis that they regarded the return to power of General Lon Nol as the only acceptable solution.

Mr. Chuop Hell's political career began in 1951, when he served five months as Agriculture Minister. He was Assembly President in 1961 and Ambassador in 1967-68.