

A CAMBODIA CHIEF SEES A VOTE SOON

Sirik Matak Pledges Prompt
Return to Democracy

By HENRY KAMM

Special to The New York Times

PNOMPENH, Cambodia, Oct. 27—Acting Premier Sisowath Sirik Matak affirmed today that the Government considered its suspension of Parliament as “very temporary” and pledged that it would act “very speedily” to restore democratic rule.

“It does no one any good to remain in the present situation,” the Acting Premier said in an interview yesterday. “It does no one any good to have a government that holds both executive and legislative powers.”

General Sirik Matak’s comments, while expansive, did not answer the question that has perplexed diplomats here: why the Government, heavily dependent on the United States, took the drastic step last week of assuming the power to rule by decree, which is certain to cast it in an unfavorable light in Washington.

Under the Constitution, the Government had the right to extend the term of Parliament for a year when it expired Oct. 18. But General Sirik Matak said: “We noted that instead of having the liberal democracy that we all want, this led to anarchy everywhere.”

Assurances to Opposition

Highly placed diplomatic sources said that the United States had told the Government that to repair the damage it should take prompt steps to assure the opposition that it would not be suppressed and to move speedily toward the adoption of a new constitution.

Principal opposition figures, in private conversations, accused the United States—in particular Ambassador Emory C. Swank—of failing to interfere strongly to save Cambodian democracy.

In the interview, General Sirik Matak outlined a course of action that would restore parliamentary democracy in about six months.

He said that the drafting committee that has been at work on a constitution was expected to complete its version in two months at the latest. When it is submitted to the Government, he said, it will take no more than two weeks for it to be presented to Parliament, which was transformed into a constituent assembly last week.

Early Referendum Foreseen

Since the members of Parliament have a vital interest in the return of normal political life, they can be expected to act speedily. General Sirik Matak said the Government would promptly hold a national referendum to adopt the constitution and would with equal speed arrange the elections for the legislature to be established under the charter.

The Acting Premier said that the constitution, being drafted by a large and representative group containing many opponents of the Government, would give Cambodia “a semipresidential system.” He said that the president would be less powerful than the President of the United States but that the Government would not be as dependent on Parliament as in some other democracies.

Cambodian and foreign observers, while conceding that some members of Parliament have been sharply critical on separate issues, as has the press, maintain that there has been a far-reaching consensus on the life-or-death matter of the war against the Vietnamese Communists and no significant moves by anyone to hamper the Government’s control of the conduct of the war.

“We are all rightists,” said Yem Sambaur in an interview. He is President of the National Assembly and was a principal target of the Government’s conflict with its members.

Guarantee for Candidacies

General Sirak Matak pledged that the Government would take no measures to restrict the political freedom of even its most outspoken opponents during the period of rule by decree and would guarantee the right of all Cambodians to seek elective office under the new constitution.

A number of deputies have reported attempts to intimidate them, particularly by the Government’s unconditional supporters in the Assembly.

Although Premier Lon Nol and the chief of state, Cheng Heng, in formal statements justifying the decree powers, said that the war prevented the holding of elections, General Sirik Matak said that the enemy’s control of large parts of Cambodian territory would not preclude the referendum on the constitution or the subsequent parliamentary elections. He said that the bulk of the population in the Communist-held regions had fled to the Government side.

Despite the assurance of speedy elections, leading oppositionists remained unconvinced. They said that the Government could not allow the election of deputies from provinces it did not control without appearing to recognize a division of Cambodia.

The Acting Premier said that he would not run either for the presidency or for Parliament. He said he did not know about Marshall Lon Nol, who is still recovering from a stroke suffered last February.