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CAMBODIAN RULE IS UNCONTESTED

Sirik Matak in Power With
Len Nol's Full Approval

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PNOMPENH, Cambodia, Oct. 30—The name to be applied to Cambodia's form of government, now that rule by decree has replaced the semblance of democracy, remains a subject of tepid discussion, but there is no doubt in any political quarter who governs Cambodia.

Premier Delegate Sisowath Sirik Matak, named last May to act on Premier Lon Nol's behalf as chief of government while the titular leader remained largely incapacitated from a stroke, has established himself so that despite Marshal Lon Nol's improving health he remains fully in charge.

He does so, according to authoritative quarters, with the full approval of the marshal. There is no sign of anything but complete trust between the two men, both 58 years old and friends since their high school days in Saigon.

Few other politicians are happy with the Premier Delegate, particularly not the handful of members of the National Assembly who constituted an incipient opposition in the shallow political life of this country, which in living memory has known only colonial domination, foreign occupation and one-man rule.

Some believe that all their political troubles are the work of General Sirik Matak. They include In Tam, who lost his post as First Deputy Premier; Yem Sambaur, who was nearly displaced as President of the National Assembly, and Douc Rasy, who was dismissed as editor of a Government-owned weekly.

They are joined in this belief by most other politicians who hoped that the overthrow last year of Prince Norodom Sihanouk as chief of state would lead to a state of politics closer to democracy. Instead, they accuse General Sirik Matak of an intolerance of opposition similar to that of Prince Sihanouk, his cousin.

The general's opponents—who for the most part speak their opposition in whispers—contend that he has an excessive hold on the principal sources of power in Cambodia. They consider these sources to be Marshal Lon Nol, for the great esteem in which he is held by the bulk of the population, and the United States, on which Cambodia depends overwhelmingly for military and economic assistance.

General Sirik Matak, in the view of most Cambodia and foreign observers, returned from his official visit to Washington last August visibly more sure of himself. Cambodian opponents suggest that the general took President Nixon's assurances of American support for his country to imply personal backing for him.

General Sirik Matak is indeed

held in high esteem by Americans here. Among a class of officials that is sometimes naive, often charmingly so, about the hard ways of international politics, the general, with princely ways and considerable experience of the world, comes closer than most to speaking and understanding the language of pragmatism.

Some Want U.S. to Act

Political opponents wish the United States had taken a strong hand in preventing what they consider undemocratic actions, such as the recent transformation of Parliament into a constituent assembly, stripping it of all powers other than preparing the new constitution.

"The little people in the embassy talk to people like me about democracy," a former minister said. "But I don't think that is what Ambassador Swank tells Sirik Matak."

American officials say their essentially hand-off attitude springs from a desire not to get the United States involved once more in the internal politics of an Asian nation. But some Cambodians suspect that the United States is wedded to General Sirik Matak because of a liking for firm rule and efficiency.

However, the view sometimes heard in the West that the Lon Nol-Sirik Matak regime is a military dictatorship is not taken seriously here. Cambodians consider the marshal and the general—the highest officers in the country—as primarily civilians. Both were in their thirties when they were given military rank at a time when Cambodia formed her army although she had no trained officers. Military power in Cambodia belongs principally to the colonels and majors who command troops.

The most politically ambitious among them, Marshal Lon Nol's brother, Lieut. Col. Lon Non, who earlier this year appeared to be attempting to keep General Sirik Matak from power, appears subdued. A number of supporters associated with him when he seemed destined for greater power have cooled in their affection.

Nor where the Cambodians shocked by the announcement that the Government was assuming emergency powers, which accompanied the decision not to renew the mandate of Parliament when it expired Oct. 18. They were a continuation of the powers the Government took when it declared a national emergency in March, 1970.