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Cambodian Rice Grab For Military

Phnom Penh

The Cambodian government has ordered all rice carried into Phnom Penh by the American airlift withheld from starving civilians and given only to the military, a senior official said yesterday.

The decision Thursday by President Lon Nol means there is no relief in sight for starving residents of the besieged capital. They have been unable to obtain provisions since the food markets closed.

Social workers confirmed that, with the exception of refugees in some camps run by American volunteers, even penniless refugees in Phnom Penh are being denied the airlifted American rice.

They said deaths resulting from starvation are increasing daily.

Most of the estimated 60,000 destitute refugees in government-run camps have to depend on their own wits to obtain food.

The director of one of the city's largest camps, housed in a half-finished luxury hotel, said in an interview:

"Only the children here (about 1000) get food. They receive a bowl of thin vegetable soup six days a week." No adults are given food, and no rice is available to feed the 5000 persons in his camp, he said.

It was thought until yesterday that the American airlift would feed all of Phnom Penh, because commercial DC-8 jets carry about 600 tons a day of rice, more than the city needs.

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