

Reshuffle of Cambodian Cabinet Expected to Bring Five Changes

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, the virtually powerless Parliament, a source of resentment among members. March 12—President Lon Nol installed a new commander of the armed forces today as Premier Long Boret began working on Cabinet changes that are expected to produce at least new ministers of defense, foreign affairs, commerce, information and the interior.

"In one of these ministries there are at least 20 people fighting for the job," a Cambodian official said.

The Premier was understood to be particularly eager to replace Interior Minister Ek Proeung, who has been widely accused of corruption.

The prospective changes were interpreted as gestures to assuage leaders who have called for the replacement of Marshal Lon Nol and his entire Government. However, the President said in a broadcast yesterday that he and the Premier would remain.

Outgoing Chief Weeps

In an emotional ceremony at the presidential palace, the outgoing military commander, Gen. Sosthene Fernandez, turned over his office to Gen. Saksut Sakhan. As President Lon Nol read the oath of office for General Saksut Sakhan then turned to bestow the Sash of the Grand Cross on General Sosthene Fernandez, the former commander wept.

All the senior officials of the outgoing Government attended the brief ceremony and the champagne reception afterwards.

Later a Cambodian Government source said that General Saksut Sakhan was the most likely candidate to fill the position of Defense Minister in the new Cabinet—a post now vacant.

General Saksut Sakhan is expected to be more pliable with such government bodies as Parliament. Some Cambodian politicians said today that General Sosthene Fernandez had refused to communicate with

Most ministers have little real power. The major decisions are made by Marshal Lon Nol himself—very much in control of the Government despite the lingering effects of a serious stroke he suffered Feb. 8, 1971—with some consultations with Mr. Long Boret and frequent discussions with the United States Ambassador, John Gunther Dean.

A Link to Sihanouk

According to his official biography, released tonight, General Saksut Sakhan, 47 years old, was educated in French military academies and from 1950 to 1957 rose from a brigade commander to Minister of Defense and Information in the Government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. His connection with the Prince, who is in exile in Peking and is the titular head of the Cambodian insurgents, has led some Western officials here to speculate that the change might be directed as much toward the rebels as a gesture of conciliation as to Congress.

Later General Saksut Sakhan served in various senior staff military positions and ambassadorial posts.

In warfare today, heavy fighting was reported on the lower Mekong River around Banam and Neak Luong, the besieged towns 38 miles south of Phnom Penh. These are the last major government-controlled towns on the river between the capital and the South Vietnamese border. However, major erosion was reported in the Government positions there.

Western military observers reported that the Government forces will attempt tomorrow to clear out the enemy rocket positions near Tuol Leap that have been launching 40 to 60 rockets daily against Pochentong Airport, the capital's last supply route.