

# Flight of French Adds To Jitters in Cambodia

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## Phnom Penh

Louis Bardollet, a French diplomat, sat at the piano playing a popular song yesterday morning — cool in his whitewashed villa with the French windows open to the garden and the flowers in the rising heat of the day.

He was dressed only in shorts and all about him lay trunks, suitcases and boxes of belongings which he had been up half the night packing.

For the French are closing their embassy in Phnom Penh on only two days' notice, and a French military aircraft is coming this morning to take the embassy staff away. As the song ended, you could hear the crump of a rocket landing in the distance in another part of the city, but except for that all was quiet. Bardollet shrugged and went back to his packing.

There was not room for all the things he had collected over the years here, and some will have to stay behind.

The decision to close the

French embassy was made in Paris, and the diplomats here have been told only that they are being flown to Bangkok. They do not know if they will ever return or, if they do, who will be in power here.

The flight of the French has special meaning for the Cambodians, as most government officials have either studied in France or were once members of the French colonial service.

France colonized Cambodia in the 19th Century at a time when it seemed inevitable that Cambodia was about to be swallowed up by the Vietnamese and the Thais. The French have kept very close ties with Cambodia in the 22 years since independence, and there are about 1000 people here of all races who hold French passports.

The French are known to believe that it is only a question of time before the Khmer Rouge insurgents take power.

The closing of the embassy is not simply a temporary matter. Paris has downgraded the post to a consulate,

and a consul will be left behind.

No one could say, however, why the embassy is being closed on such short notice. "Obviously Paris knows something we don't know," Bardollet said, "but what."

It is true that ousted Cambodian leader Norodom Sihanouk has warned embassies to quit Phnom Penh for their own safety, but he has said that before in other years, and the French have never closed their embassy.

Some Cambodians are predicting that it means the French may switch diplomatic recognition to the exile government of Prince Sihanouk in Peking.

The flight of the French has added to the general jitters here, for the insurgents usually make a demonstration of strength on March 18 — the fifth anniversary of Prince Sihanouk's overthrow.

Although arrangements will be made to take French citizens out who want to go, the majority will probably stay, according to French embassy sources.