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Cambodia 'Disaster'

Rebels Capture Key River Port

Phnom Penh

Khmer Rouge insurgents last night captured the key Mekong river port of Neak Luong, the last Cambodian government-held enclave on the Mekong river south of Phnom Penh.

One official Cambodian source called it "a major disaster."

The fall of Neak Luong followed by hours the departure of President Lon Nol. He flew to Indonesia and was expected to visit the United States later.

Official sources said the fall of Neak Luong left several thousand additional insurgent troops free to join the siege of Phnom Penh, 30 miles to the northwest.

The sources said that along with Neak Luong the nearby outpost of Banam, 30 miles southeast of Phnom Penh, also fell.

As many as 65,000 soldiers, local residents and refugees were inside the defense perimeters of the two towns when they fell.

Few details of the fighting or casualties were available, but a convoy of nine landing craft which reached Phnom Penh about midnight carrying about 200 marines and dependents was believed to be the only force which escaped.

One boat was sunk by rebel fire on the way to the capital.

As the 61-year-old Lon Nol prepared to leave the country, insurgents fired a barrage of rockets and shells on Pochentong International Airport and the Cambodian capital.

Three persons were killed and six wounded in the shelling. One shell, which landed in the compound of the presidential palace shortly before Lon Nol left, killed one person and wounded two others.

According to the Cambodian high command, 38 insurgent rockets struck the airport throughout the day. It did not report any casualties or damage.

Lon Nol flew first to Thailand for a brief meeting with Thai officials and then to Indonesia, where he will spend ten days relaxing on the lush tourist island of Bali. From there, Lon Nol, partly crippled from a 1971 stroke, is to fly to Hawaii for medical treatment, reliable sources say.

He was accompanied by Premier Long Boret, and some analysts said there was little chance either would ever return despite a recorded radio broadcast in which Lon Nol pledged to come home when his health returned or if the country needed him.

Both men, along with former President Cheng Heng, who arrived in Paris yesterday, have been marked for death by the insurgents.

Reuters