

Heavy

Phnom Penh  
Fighting

Phnom Penh

The Cambodian insurgents, closing in on Phnom Penh from almost all sides, reached the southern edge of the capital after dark yesterday, and heavy fighting was going on there.

The exchange of machine-gun, mortar and small-arms fire was intense, and flames from burning houses and burning factory turned the sky pink around the United Nations bridge, which marks the city's southern edge.

It was impossible to get close to the fighting but people fleeing the scene said the insurgents were firing bazooka-like rockets into government lines and also setting fire to homes.

These eyewitnesses said that government forces were using armored personnel carriers equipped with mortars and heavy machine guns to try to block the insurgents from breaking into the city.

The insurgents were driving on this capital from the north along highway 5, from the northwest across a marshy plain, from the west, where the airport has been virtually cut off, and from the south and southeast where government troops were reported abandoning their positions en masse.

South of the city, one government unit tried to save itself by jumping into the Bassac river. Several men drowned trying to reach its western bank.

As of early evening, there was growing nervousness but no panic yet inside the capital. The government was still vowing to fight to the last man, but the situation began looking more and more hopeless.

Should the government

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make a last-ditch stand to hold the city, instead of surrendering, the bloodshed from shelling and street fighting in this crowded city could be terrible.

Throughout the day, as its position steadily crumbled, the government moved frantically to try to halt the insurgent advances — abandoning posts all around the capital's outer defense-peri-

meter and rushing these troops back by helicopter to defend Phnom Penh.

On Monday, after being poised outside the city for weeks, the insurgents began their big push.

The pullout of the American embassy last Saturday and the simultaneous halting of the American supply airlift, which had been the only thing keeping the Phnom Penh government alive, was

apparently the signal for the insurgents to move.

The drive Monday came primarily from one side of the city, the west and northwest. But on Tuesday, they attacked from all directions.

For the second straight day, frightened refugees by thousands continued to stream toward this capital, already swollen to more than two million people.

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