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New Viet President

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Minh Peace Bid Rejected

Saigon

General Duong Van Minh assumed the presidency of South Vietnam yesterday to make peace with the Communists, but the latter rejected his initial declaration and continued attacks around Saigon.

Minh's statement, among other things, called for a quick cease-fire and the start of peace negotiations.

The 59-year-old former general known as "Big Minh" assumed office in a reception room of Doc Lap Presidential Palace here, in

the presence of most of the 146 members of the National Assembly and about 100 journalists and photographers. Proceedings were broadcast by live television.

Speaking to the Communists, Minh said, "We sincerely want reconciliation, you clearly know that. Reconciliation demands that each element of the nation respect the other's right to live. This is the spirit of the Paris agreement."

He added that the Communist "standpoint has always been the implementation of that agreement."

The installation ceremony began at just the moment the first big monsoon storm of the season struck the city, and the speeches of participants were punctuated by the flash of lightning and crash of thunder, while rain and wind swept through open patio doors.

Outgoing President Tran Yan Huong, who had held office only one week after the resignation of President Nguyen Van Thieu, wished Minh good luck in carrying out his mandate.

When Huong stepped down, the presidential seal was removed and replaced with Minh's personal emblem.

In his 15-minute speech, the new president referred to the Viet Cong throughout as "the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam," and directly addressed part of his speech "to our friends of the other side."

After Minh's speech, Hanoi radio broadcast a statement in English harsher in tone than any in recent days, calling on the people of Saigon to rise up. An "uprising" is a Communist euphemism for an attack in force.

By telephone, the Viet Cong read a statement that denounced the United States for allegedly still intervening in Vietnam. The statement called on the United States "to annul the Saigon administration of war and repression," and said the aspirations of the Vietnamese people embodied by the Paris peace accord must be met.

The declaration by Minh did "not conform with these objectives," they said.

Minh, besides calling for peace, warned that the situation is very grim.

"The coming days will be very difficult," he said. "I am not promising you much."

But he said that economic and social activities would

be soon normalized, conditions of life would be improved and refugees would be helped. Political freedom would be restored and political prisoners would be released, he added.

It was understood that Minh, with the help of aides, is working around the clock to stave off an attack and reach peaceful settlement with the Communists.

But Minh is known to greatly fear the possible military backlash of elements of the armed forces, and for this apparent reason, phrased his speech in such a way that it could encourage some military men to fight on. He called for them to defend the territory remaining under government control.

Minh appointed only two subordinates yesterday and not an entire cabinet.

He named Nguyen Van Huyen, a lawyer, as vice president "to help me in the negotiations," and Vu Van Mau, a prominent Buddhist