

# Millions Uprooted By Khmer Rouge

## Cambodians Being 'Purified'

Bangkok

Under a blanket of total silence, Cambodia is now being "purified."

The Khmer Rouge forces, which took over the country on April 17, had long ago prepared a plan to move millions of inhabitants into liberated zones where they would be instilled with the spirit of service to the revolution.

They have been forcibly evacuated from at least the main centers of population through which the first convo of refugees from the French embassy in Phnom Penh passed — Kompong Chhang, Pursat and Battambang, plus the capital — with only the bare minimum of goods necessary for survival. They have discarded luxury articles like sewing machines, electric fans, folding beds and cars by the wayside.

When journalists in the evacuation convoy asked where all the people had gone, they were told: "They have gone to liberated areas organized to receive them. Later they will return to their homes, clean."

They will return with no useless belongings, to start their life from zero, free of the artificial needs of the Western world that was never theirs. That is the plan.

But the plan went momentarily awry on April 17, when Phnom Penh was taken with hardly a shot fired by a 200-strong command of student infiltrators led by a 29-year-old former Paris student and playboy, Hem Keth Dara.

He told a mid-morning press conference at the information ministry that after breakfasting with his French wife, Joelle, and his two children, he and his black-clad band walked through the capital disarming republican troops while

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the regular Khmer Rouge surrounding the city prepared for the fourth day of their planned seven-day final assault on Phnom Penh.

But soon after mid-day liberation forces systematically took over the city street by street and Hem Keth Dara was disarmed and forgotten. Politicians of the old regime, notably Premier Long Boret, gave themselves up to the Khmer Rouge were given a formally warm welcome.

Others were not so confident of their welcome: Sirik Matak, prime minister under ex-President Marshal Lon Nol, Laotian Princess Mani Vanh — one of Prince Sihanouk's wives — and National Assembly President Hong Boun Hor, weeping hysterically and carrying a suitcase stuffed with dollars, were among those Cambodians reluctantly given refuge in the French embassy by Consul Jean Dyrac. The less fortunate desperately threw their babies over the walls to imagined safety.

Sirik Matak had good reason to seek refuge. He was one of the seven "super traitors" in principle condemned to a death by the Khmer Rouge. But his sanctuary was to prove short-lived.

Even more ephemeral was the international zone declared by the Red Cross at



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the Phnom Hotel the day before: It was cleared within 30 minutes between 5:30 p.m. and six.

That afternoon the whole population was ordered to leave the capital for "the north" — the "purification zones," although their destination was not revealed at the time — and three days later, on April 20, the authorities demanded that all Cambodians leave the French embassy.

Their departure was not made any easier by rumors about atrocities: There were reports of 200 heads lying in the marketplace, of between 8000 and 80,000 bodies, mainly old people and children, rotting along Highway 5 leading north.

But latecomers to the embassy said that nothing of the kind had taken place: On the contrary they reported that the revolutionary forces had treated everyone extremely well. Nevertheless, several fearful Cambodians begged French doctors to administer euthanasia to themselves and their families. Their requests were refused.

Now the harrowing days of uncertainty began for the 600-plus foreigners left in the embassy.

As liberation troops concentrated on systematic looting and destruction of all Western-style installations and property — and blasted the Soviet embassy's armored doors with bazookas — the embassy refugees were at first left to fend for themselves. The city water supply had been cut off the previous afternoon and food was running low.

By April 22, the water had almost run out, rice was precious and the 606 refugees decided to limit "meals" to one a day.

As ugly quarrels broke out over a cup of water, the Khmer-Rouge decided to provide a tanker of Mekong River water — which had to be boiled for 20 minutes because the river was full of bodies.

By April 23, low-level and fragmentary contact had been established with the Khmer Rouge. In the afternoon food supplies arrived, along with a few French stragglers who told eager listeners that the city had been completely cleared of all non-military life.

As the days wore on the first illnesses struck the refugees. Later there were to be more than 100 cases of dysentery and one of viral hepatitis, giving rise to happily baseless fears of an epidemic.

On April 25, after eight days of negative response to his contacts with the Khmer Rouge, Consul Jean Dyrac decided to stress in a verbal note to whatever superiors might receive it that the revolution's international image could well suffer by the treatment the embassy refugees were being given.

Two days later his efforts were partially rewarded. The military high command, in its first direct contact with the embassy, said that all foreigners would be evacuated starting on April 30, by truck to Poipet on the Thai border. Appeals for air or sea transport were refused.

On the morning of the 30th, 25 Chinese and American trucks rumbled out of the embassy on their long ½ day haul north.

At stops along the way the refugees were met with nothing but kindness from the villagers: Food and drink were freely given and offers of repayment refused with a gentle "You need it more than we do." Attambang the evacuees were switched to military vehicles with canopies against the driving rain and a military escort which was more friendly because the soldiers had not been in the front line recently.

One young soldier, accepting a cigaret and a surreptitious swig of Chinese wine, said he had been fighting for three years and had not seen his family for 18 months. He was very proud of what the Khmer Rouge had accomplished and when asked whether he was going to a restful family life replied: "No, because now I must go and make revolution in Thailand."