

Bangkok Hopes Visit Results in Ties**Cambodian Leader Seeks Thai Aid**

By Lewis M. Simons

Washington Post Staff Writer

BANGKOK, Oct. 28—Cambodian Vice Premier Ieng Sary arrived here Tuesday morning in search of economic assistance and "peaceful coexistence" with Thailand.

Although Sary, who is in charge of Cambodia's foreign affairs, made no mention of establishing diplomatic relations with Thailand, prospects for a formalized relationship seemed good.

Cambodia is known to be in desperate need of rice, a commodity Thailand has in excess, and Thai Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj is expected to set diplomatic relations as the price.

Sary's visit, the first by any senior Cambodian official to a non-Communist Southeast Asian nation since the Khmer Rouge took control of the country six months ago, is to last five days. During that time he is expected to meet with Kukrit, Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan and other government leaders.

Diplomatic observers here consider the visit significant in itself—even if it does not improve relations between Cambodia and Thailand—because it opens the tightly sealed doors of Cambodia just a crack. The new Communist government broke relations with most countries when it took power in April.

In a brief arrival statement, Sary referred to his government's efforts to rebuild the war-torn nation.

"We are actively relieving the economy, promoting production and building the country by firmly holding to our independence and sovereignty, to be the masters of the situation, and to rely on our own forces," he said.

Sary, wearing a gray, Mao-style suit, also said, "The government of Cambodia has given this delegation permission to come here to promote peaceful coexistence with Thailand."

He did not mention his country's pressing food needs, but Thai leaders have already made clear their desire to provide rice and other requirements to the new Communist government.

With the Cambodian rice harvest more than a month off, the Khmer Rouge authorities face an immediate need for food that their allies in China and North Vietnam have not been able to fill.

Agricultural experts in Bangkok also have doubts about how successful the harvest will be. One specialist said that rice paddies that have not been worked for an extended period, as was the case in Cambodia during the five-year war there, usually do not produce full crops.

Khmer Rouge military officers, acting on behalf of

their government, have been purchasing rice from traders in Aranyapatet, a Thai border town. These sales, which are illegal in Thailand, have been made at exorbitant prices that have caused a major hard-currency drain in Phnom Penh.

This week's negotiating is likely to center on whether the xenophobic Khmer Rouge are willing to permit the Thais to establish an embassy in Phnom Penh as the basic price for legitimately sold rice.

Informed sources believe that the two sides will compromise somewhere short of a full diplomatic exchange. One possibility is that relations will be established without representation in the two capitals.

A second possible result, less satisfactory from the Thai viewpoint, would be establishment of a trade commission to handle sales of rice as well as other commodities vitally needed in Cambodia, such as petroleum products.

Thailand is keenly interested in diplomatic relations, largely for what one informed source termed "psychological security." Following Communist victories in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the Thai authorities have felt themselves isolated all along their country's eastern frontier.

In addition to the two basic questions of economic assistance and diplomatic

relations, Sary is certain to want to discuss the return of a large number of Cambodian air force planes that were flown to Thailand when the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh last April. Both sides are also certain to want to discuss the repatriation of some twenty thousand Cambodians who fled to this country.

Sary and his party of eight arrived aboard a Chinese Boeing 707 airliner from Phnom Penh and the Chinese charge d'affaires was in the greeting party.

The presence of the Chinese diplomat and the fact that the Cambodian group flew aboard a Chinese aircraft seemed to confirm the closeness of China and Cambodia. Although Sary himself is considered pro-Hanoi, diplomatic observers admit that they know very little about him or the rest of the Khmer Rouge high command.

In another development indicating the waning U.S. influence here, the United States handed over Nakhon Phanom Air Base in northeast Thailand to the Thai government.

Withdrawal from the base, once the command center for the American air war in Indochina, left the United States with about 16,000 servicemen still stationed at three bases in Thailand. The U.S. withdrawal and turnover of bases is to be completed by next March.