

# CAMBODIA FORCES A NEW MIGRATION, REFUGEES REPORT

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Hundreds of Thousands Are

Said to Be Moved, Again

With a High Death Toll  
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ARANYAPRATHET, Thailand, Jan. 19—Hundreds of thousands of people are being moved from one part of Cambodia to another, frequently at gunpoint, in a migration that rivals the forced evacuation from Phnom Penh last April, according to Western intelligence sources and interviews here with scores of refugees, some of whom escaped from convoys.

By train, truck, oxcart and on foot, the peasants, including many who were originally forced into the countryside from Phnom Penh, are reportedly being shifted principally into the more sparsely populated northwestern area of the country, primarily Battambang Province.

As in the first migration, according to refugee accounts, many have died on the rigorous journeys—the precise numbers may never be known—either of disease, or simply weakness and the hardships of the journey, the purpose of which is still not known for sure.

## Settlers Shifted

Among the explanations advanced by those who took part—and they were never told the reason by Cambodian officials—were the greater availability of vacant land in the new areas, the need for workers to develop these regions and the desire to break up any possible anti-Government groupings that might be forming.

Settlers in such areas as Takeo, Kompong Speu, Kompong Cham and Kompong Chhnang

were being shifted to such other towns as Pursat, Sisophon and Phnom Srok.

The migration first began, according to most accounts, in late October or early November and is continuing, according to refugees who are arriving daily at the principal refugee camp here in Aranyaprathet and in others scattered along the Cambodian-Thai frontier.

Chou Tri, 33 years old, arrived here on Jan. 6. In the month before he left his home in a small district capital, Phnom Srok, on Dec. 28 to make the difficult journey to the border, he said that some 65,000 families had arrived in the region around the town.

Mr. Chou Tri, who, as a senior employee in the regional dispensary was favorably placed to observe the movements, said that most of the new arrivals were closely guarded by government troops and were taken immediately

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to remote uncleared areas of jungle around Phnom Srok.

He said they came from a variety of locations—as far away as Kampot on the sea-coast, from Kompong Chhnang and Takeo, and from Phnom Penh.

Many, he said, were seriously ill with malaria, typhoid, cholera and dysentery when they arrived. He said that he had seen 600 die in the first month after their arrival and before his departure.

There were no drugs to treat them, he said, only some herbal medicines. And he said, these were by and large distributed by dispensary workers who could not read or write and therefore did not know what the labels.

Those who were able-bodied, he said, particularly the few young men and the young women, were immediately set to work harvesting the rice crop, which he described as one of the best in years, or digging irrigation ditches and building earthworks or clearing land.

## Ration of Rice

He said that he had been told a number of stories involving hardship on the march itself, including the death of nearly all the members of the village of Kompong Speu, most of

whom had been severely weakened by lack of food.

But he said he was unable to confirm these reports.

There were many instances of young girls had stopped menstruating because of the difficult conditions and lack of proper nutrition.

Mr. Chou Tri said that he was given, at the end, only two small condensed-milk cans full of rice each day and no meat or vegetables, although he tried to grow some vegetables in a small garden behind his house.

He said that he also saw instances where villagers who did not work or who were deemed not to be working hard enough by Government officials or soldiers were beaten with tree branches. "And those who were disciplined were killed," he added.

Much of what Mr. Chou Tri said was confirmed by other refugees. Pich Vang Praseth, the 40-year-old unofficial president of the Aranyaprathet refugee camp, said that similar reports were being received in refugee centers up and down the Cambodian border. Western intelligence officials in Bangkok said that they first began receiving definite information on the new migration more than a month ago and were still receiving it regularly.

Many refugees also agreed to talk about their experiences in Cambodia only on the condition that their names not be disclosed nor their photographs taken, fearing reprisals from nervous Thai refugee officials.

The Thai Government, officially, allows no access to refugees except for some international relief agency workers or diplomats. But on occasion some reporters have been able to slip into the refugee camps and talk with the Cambodians, who are still leaving Cambodia at a rate of several hundreds a week all along the frontier.

## Meaning is Unclear

There is still some question as to what these huge shifts in population mean in terms of the control the Communist Government has managed to the first year of its control of the country.

"There is no question they are becoming increasingly better organized," said one Western diplomat who speaks Khmer and spends much of his time on analysis of Cambodian affairs. "What we believe is happening is that local control throughout the country that had been the rule during and immediately after the war is diminishing and national, centralized control is increasing."

"These movements, for instance, show excellent coordination, moving the excess popu-





NYT Pictures/Sarah Webb Barrell

**Cambodians awaiting rations recently at camp in Aranyaprathet, a border town east of Bangkok, Thailand. According to these refugees and intelligence reports, the Government again is forcing massive population shifts.**

lation of the country precisely to where they are most needed, where they are most economically effective."

#### Worked in Fields

Ang Sokthan was one of those who had been on both migrations—from Phnom Penh last April and on the second migration in November from and finally to Sisophon, less than 30 miles from the Thai border.

Miss Ang Sokthan arrived at the border less than a month ago. She lives with relatives who are rice traders in this border town, not crowded into

the refugee camp on the edge of the village. She agreed to talk about her experience.

Last April, when the Communists entered the capital at Phnom Penh, she had been a student there studying pharmacology. She was originally from Siem Reap where her parents, she believes, still live, but when she was herded out of the city she was not sent north to Siem Reap, but south to Takeo where she worked in the fields.

"A gong woke us at sunrise and we went to the fields, where we worked until about noon, when we had an hour

for lunch," she recalled. "Then we began again and worked until it was dark, when we went home."

"When we arrived home, the rice was already cooked—it was all we usually got, rice with some salt and we ate that. Then on nights when there was a full moon, we went back to the fields and worked some more, until about 11 o'clock. On dark nights, we did not work."

She spoke in Khmer through

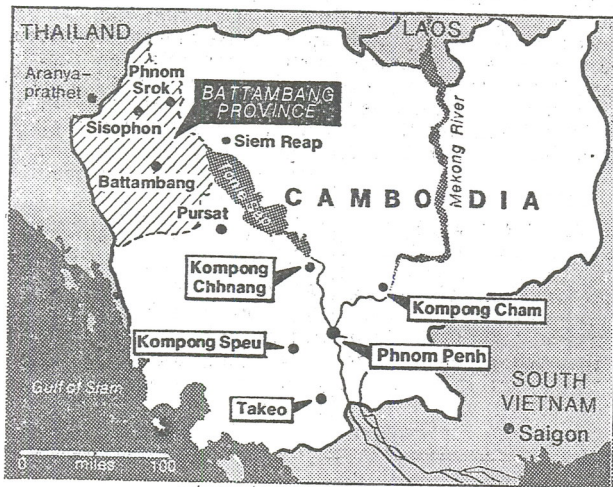
an interpreter and occasionally in French when she wished to emphasize a point.

She said that the village was organized into small units of about 15 families, each with a captain.

#### Fruit-Picking Forbidden

The captain would go each day to a central storehouse where he was given the rice ration for his people. The old women who stayed behind in the village were ordered to





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Cambodians are reportedly being shifted from the areas marked by white panels to Battambang Province region.

cook the rice for the field workers.

She said that the food was very plain and they were not allowed to pick fruit from the trees. "They said it belonged to the people," she said and shrugged. "If they caught anyone picking fruit they were severely scolded," she said. "After four such times, they were taken away and we did not see them again."

The people in the village believed that those away were killed, but she said that she did not know personally whether that was true.

Finally, one day later in October, all the residents of Takeo were called together in the central square and told that they were leaving, though they were not told their destination or why. They were taken immediately to the railroad station and loaded on train.

The train consisted of about 10 boxcars and "we were packed in like fish in a can." There were about 1,000 families on the train. With her were her two brothers and a sister. The train headed for Pursat,

passing quickly through Phnom Penh, which she said was "very quiet."

On the trip, which lasted about eight days, with stops and starts, both of her brothers became very ill. She said they had Malaria, and died before they reached Pursat.

#### Big Truck Convoy

From Pursat they were loaded on trucks, in a convoy consisting of about 50 trucks, for the ride to Sisophon. Each truck also carried two armed soldiers. In Sisophon, she said, she complained of being ill and was placed in a dispensary.

About a month later, together with 30 others, including her sister, Miss Ang Sokthan slipped away during the night and headed for the border. Eleven days later, eight of the party made it across. She said the rest either died on the way or disappeared, including her sister.

"I thought about escape ever since April, all the time," she said. "But it had to be the right time. In Takeo it was too far from Thailand. Now it was easier, so I had to do

it." She said that another brother was studying in Canada and she hoped to go there to join him.

She said that she was never told the reason for the transfer to Sisophon, although once they arrived there the able-bodied were put to work harvesting the rice crop. Nor did any of those on the migration dare to ask the purpose of the shift. "It was just not done, asking questions like that," she added.

#### Workers From Factories

Other refugees said that they had encountered workers from factories in Phnom Penh who had been forced out of the capital last April and several months later brought back to their factories.

There, they were told to begin operating the machinery again, particularly in the textile works and rubber factory, and at the same time were told to instruct Government officials in the operations of the factory. When the officials had mastered the techniques last fall, these refugees said, they were put on trucks and shipped up to the northwest to join those from the rural areas.

Mr. Pich Vang Praseth said that there were reports that a number of villagers in various regions, loyal to Prince Norodom Sihanouk, had confronted Government officials loyal to such Communist leaders as Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan and that the Government was concerned that this could become the seed for a resistance movement. But he said that there was no evidence that any such resistance had actually broken out.

But he also noted that there was tremendous need for the building and repair of dikes and irrigation systems damaged by the war, particularly in areas of the northwest and that manpower was needed.

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