

Saigon to Look at Tiger Cages

Associated Press

Saigon

South Vietnam launched an investigation yesterday into conditions on the prison island of Con Son as an international furor shaped up over charges of mistreatment of prisoners there.

The latest charges were leveled by three Saigon University students recently re-

leased from Con Son who called a news conference to recount their experiences in captivity.

The three claimed that, in addition to being locked up in the previously disclosed "tiger cages," prisoners were kept in what they called "cattle cages."

As many as 17 prisoners were jammed into "cattle cages," the students

claimed. They described the cells as hotter than the smaller "tiger cages," in which, they said, inmates were confined without adequate water, food or sanitation facilities.

The students charged that South Vietnamese authorities lied about the "tiger cages" when they said Thursday that only 400 of the island's

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9000 prisoners were confined in them.

The students contended that the "tiger cages" held about 1200 inmates, including women and children.

Radio Hanoi, in a follow-up of charges made at the Paris peace talks, claimed that more than 100 political prisoners died in the "tiger cages" in the first nine months of last year and that another 100 were missing.

DEFENSE

In Britain, the Times of London commented editorially that "the tiger cages speak for themselves all too clearly."

"What sort of a government is being defended at great cost in American lives?" the Times asked.

The Saigon government's investigation of Con Son was undertaken by a ten-man team from the Interior Ministry. The team flew to the island 140 miles southeast of Saigon for an on-the-spot inquiry.

The investigation, ordered by Premier Tran Thien Khiem, marked a quick turnabout by the government, which said Thursday that no special probe would be made.

CONGRESSMEN

The clamor over Con Son erupted after disclosures of beatings, shackling of prisoners and other mistreatment that were made following a visit to the island last week by two U.S. Congressmen.

In a statement announcing the official probe, the government said: "If, as a result of the investigation, the charges are found to be accurate, the government will take steps to redress the situation and to order the abolition of the so-called tiger cages.

"It is the policy of the government of the Republic of Vietnam to give decent treatment to all prisoners, civilian and military, and to strictly observe international agreements on prisoners, particularly the Geneva agreements."