

# Cambodia Regime Seizes Opportunity To Tighten Its Grip and Curb Its Foes

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, March 23 — The Government of President Lon Nol has taken advantage of two violent incidents that occurred on March 17 to neutralize its internal opposition and consolidate its absolute power.

In the consensus of reliable Cambodians and diplomats, the first incident, a grenade attack on a meeting of striking teachers, was mounted by the Government itself. The same sources consider the second, an abortive raid by a dissident pilot on the president's residence, an individual action unconnected with any group.

Yet without offering evidence, the Government has proclaimed both incidents to be the result of a vague Communist-Royalist plot, has declared the highest state of national emergency, and has suspended remaining civil liberties. It has arrested many people suspected of independent political thinking, as well as members of the royal family, and has closed all newspapers that it does not own.

A Cabinet minister said in an interview that the imminent declaration of a state of emergency had been the principal topic of discussion at a Cabinet meeting on the day before the incidents, indicating that the Government planned its measures even before the acts that it says prompted them.

## Many Fear Detention

As a result of the wave of arrests and house arrests—believed to have affected several hundred people—the timid political circles of Phnom Penh that do not support the regime of Marshal Lon Nol and his younger brother, Brig. Gen. Lon Non, have been plunged into terror.

Members of the small educated elite, including many Government officials, are afraid that a knock at the door may mean arrest or, at least, a search of their houses. Some prefer to sleep away from home, often in pagodas. Fear is most widespread among teachers and students who have been

active in the month-old teachers' strike that has closed all public schools and centers of higher education.

The Government's actions, directed by a so-called national defense committee presumably headed by General Lon Non, have been aimed chiefly at its only active opposition, the teachers and students, and the principal political figure of sufficient stature to threaten the Lon brothers' hold.

He is Lieut. Gen. Sisowath Sirik Matak, former chief of government and cofounder, with Marshal Lon Nol, of the Khmer Republic. General Sirik Matak's potential strength derives from his own stature and is greatly enhanced by the fact that he enjoys the confidence of the United States to a higher degree than any other Cambodian.

The campaign of political re-



The New York Times

President Lon Nol

pression has served also for the settlement of individual scores. The arrest of Ngon Chhay Kry, secretary general of the Foreign Ministry, an inoffensive man of no known political activity, was apparently provoked because he was the man who had been collecting rent on behalf of Queen Kossomak from the tenants of her villas. Queen Kossomak is the mother of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the deposed head of state, who is now in exile in China.

The official reason for the antiroyalist campaign is the fact that the pilot who dropped the bombs that missed the presidential residence and killed about 50 people, mainly children, instead, was one of the many lovers of a daughter of Prince Sihanouk.

The real reason, in the view of informed Cambodians and most diplomats, is General Lon Non's determination to eliminate from access to power General Sirik Matak, his only serious rival for influence over his partly paralyzed brother, the President.

General Lon Non appeared to have achieved this even earlier, to the chagrin of the United States, when he announced that whether the President wanted General Sirik Matak as vice president or

not, General Sirik Matak, as a former prince, was unacceptable.

The bombing raid provided General Lon Non with the occasion to crack down on alleged royalist plotters, a couple of dozen harmless bearers of Norodom or Sisowath names, and put them under house arrest. Sixteen of them have been moved in with Queen Kossomak in her villa.

## Guard Is Doubled

This could not be done to Central Sirik Matak, according to the Under Secretary of Information, Thong Lim Huong, an associate of General Lon Non, "because he is a friend of the marshal." Instead, the guard in front of General Sirik Matak's house was doubled and its commander instructed to "reduce the number of his visitors."

The lasting effect of the attack on the strike meeting, beyond the wave of arrests of teachers, journalists and intellectuals and the panic it has thrown into those not arrested, remains to be seen.

Under the emergency powers, the Government has ordered the 20,000 teachers to return to work but at the same time has ordered schools closed indefinitely "to reorganize the maintenance of order and the fight against subversive elements that have infiltrated."

The strike, which began over the issue of rising prices and stable salaries, has become the vehicle for much of the political discontent over a losing war and an unpopular government that exists among the educated minority. In this authoritarian and politically inactive country, it has taken on the aspect of an opposition movement.

General Lon Non tried earlier this month to calm the teachers' rising unhappiness by debating with them in a mass meeting, but he was angered instead by finding them intransigent. It is generally assumed that the violence at the meeting on March 17 was a measure of that anger.

#### Message From Nixon

Although Marshal Lon Nol, in a message of thanks to President Nixon for a telegram of sympathy over the attempt on his life, declared that the attempt and the violence at the teachers' meeting were part of the same "enemy" plot—and committed the breach of protocol of publishing the message—the United States offers this no credence.

But unhappy though Americans here are over the mounting political repression, Mr. Nixon once more told Marshal Lon Nol in his message that "the American people wish to renew our expressions of admiration for the Khmer peoples' courage and steadfastness under your leadership in these grave times and we wish to reaffirm assurances of our continued support."

To back up the words, B-52's and tactical bombers continue their daily round of missions throughout Cambodia, and military and economic assistance at the rate of \$200-million a year continues to flow in.

## CAMBODIANS REPORT CLASH NEAR CAPITAL

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, March 26 (Reuters)—Communist troops reportedly clashed with Government soldiers today only five miles west of Phnom Penh's city boundary.

The Cambodian command said 10 Government soldiers were wounded during the attack, which the Communist force staged across open rice fields on the far side of the capital's airport. A few hours later, shells were fired at Government positions on the slopes of Phnom Baset, a hill eight miles northwest of the city line.

Meanwhile, all but one of Cambodia's seven national highways remained cut tonight at varying distances from the capital. The latest to be severed was Route 4, which links Phnom Penh with the country's only deep-water port, Kompong Som in the southwest.

Only Route 5—from Phnom Penh to the rice-growing regions of the northwest—is now open.

HONOLULU, March 26 (UPI)

— The United States Pacific command announced today that American fighter-bombers and B-52 heavy bombers continued raids over Cambodia during the day at the request of the Cambodian Government.