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Lon Nol to Leave As Step to Peace

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — President Lon Nol, under pressure from the United States, soon will turn over the Cambodian government to a former close associate and go to Hawaii for medical treatment, reliable sources reported today.

The return to power of Siso-wath Sirik Matak is intended to pave the way for cease-fire negotiations with the Communists and other supporters of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the deposed chief of state.

Since Sirik Matak lost in a power struggle with the president's younger brother, Lon Non, he has headed the opposition Republican party.

The sources said he would be named vice president with almost no limits on what he can do. They said he already has some men lined up for administrative posts in his caretaker government.

The ailing president, who never recovered fully from a stroke in February 1971, is expected to go to Hawaii in March.

Lon Nol has been coaxing Sirik Matak to take the No. 2 post for many months. But Sirik Matak resisted, wary of

the power Lon Non has built up as his brother's closest adviser.

Informants said the president agreed to curb his brother's power because of strong pressure from the United States, on which the Phnom Penh regime is completely dependent for military, economic, financial and diplomatic support.

The Communists have refused to talk with Lon Nol's regime, and the government has been making only rudimentary contacts with the other side. The U.S. government reportedly hopes that, with the government in new hands even if only temporarily, the Communists may curtail their military operations around Phnom Penh and agree to cease-fire talks.

By all accounts, Lon Nol forced his brother and the hierarchy of the president's Social Republican party to agree to Sirik Matak's return to power only after bitter confrontations. Informed sources said they acquiesced only after an ultimatum from the president that he would resign if he did not get his way. His resignation would have thrown the party into disarray and would have wiped out the base of Lon Non's power.

The president's brother was a military police major during the coup against Sihanouk and has since risen to brigadier general and a cabinet post with sweeping powers.

There are rumors that Lon Non will accompany his brother abroad, leave soon afterward on a "promotional" tour for Cambodia or accept some sort of assignment in the United States.

There are indications, however, that Lon Non may stay and try to preserve the power base he has established. He recently forced a few changes in military commands, perhaps to undermine officers he considers unfavorable to him.