

Cambodia Planning Legislative Election As a Peace Move

MAR 15 1973

PHNOM PENH, March 14 (Reuters)—President Lon Nol today ordered Government officials to prepare for a general election to replace the six-month-old National Assembly.

The Government described the planned elections as a peace move. The date was not specified.

Information Minister Keam Reth said at a news conference that one aim of the elections was to attract supporters of warring Communists back to peaceful voting.

The proposal was also part of an effort to reconcile non-Communist opponents of the Government, to set up a united front among Phnom Penh's political groups.

The President's decision to hold legislative elections was contained in a statement given to Government departments during the day but not immediately made public.

Governing Party Split

The decision followed closely a major split between the Government and the two-chamber Assembly over the handling of wartime inflation.

But Mr. Keam Reth denied that hostility between the Parliamentary and Cabinet wings of the governing Social-Republican party had influenced the decision.

He described as coincidental the absence this morning of five Cabinet Ministers called before the Assembly to answer criticism of the Government's economic policy.

The Information Minister said that the Government would like to see greater security in the countryside before the voting took place. He declined to speculate whether there would be a signed cease-fire.

He said that the Government was sounding out Communists on the prospect of their participation in the elections. They were theoretically permitted to take part in parliamentary elections last September but none did so.