

LAOTIANS CANCEL WEEKLY MEETING

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Vientiane Negotiations Are Seen at Critical Stage

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VIENTIANE, Laos, April 3—

For the first time in 20 weeks, Laotian Government and Communist negotiators did not meet today for their regular Tuesday session, and there were signs that efforts to form a coalition government had entered a critical phase.

Today's meeting was called off at the request of the head of the Vientiane negotiating team, Ngon Sananikone, who apparently felt that another meeting would accomplish nothing at this stage. The delegation leaders are continuing private talks between themselves, however.

One of the snags in the talks since the Laotian cease-fire went into effect on Feb. 22 has been the absence from Vientiane of the chief Pathet Lao negotiator, Phoumi Vongvichit, who left here for consultations in Samneua soon after signing the truce accord.

Authoritative Communist sources reported this week that Mr. Phoumi Vongvichit was seriously ill. But a rumor was circulated today by several Vientiane Government officials to the effect that he had been shot in a dispute with an opposing faction of the Pathet Lao.

Aide Has Full Authority

In any case, Gen. Phoune Sipraseuth, the regular head of the Pathet Lao negotiating mission in Vientiane, has reportedly been assigned full powers to negotiate with the Vientiane Government in Mr. Phoumi Vongvichit's absence.

The small Soviet-built biplane assigned to the Pathet Lao for communication between here and its de facto capital at Samneua left here today on a presumably important flight. Normally, senior Pathet Lao officials prefer to travel to Samneua by way of Hanoi on a regular Soviet Aeroflot flight, and have indicated that they distrust the biplane.

There was diplomatic speculation that the nominal leader of the Pathet Lao, Prince Souphanouvong, would come in person to the royal capital, Luang Prabang, this week for a meeting on Friday with Prince Souvanna Phouma, the Premier.

The two warring princes are half-brothers. It is assumed that if, as expected, Prince Souvanna Phouma continues as Premier in a new provisional coalition government, Prince Souphanouvong will be the probable candidate of the Pathet Lao for the office of deputy premier.

One difficulty reportedly still confronting the negotiations is Pathet Lao insistence that there be only one deputy premier. On the Government side, many leaders would like to see a government reverting to the tripartite principle, with a neutralist premier and two deputy premiers, one from the left and one from the right.

Cities To Be Neutralized

Another difficulty has been the lack of agreement on details for neutralizing the cities of Vientiane and Luang Prabang, as provided in general terms by the cease-fire accord. The allocation of police and guard posts, with neither side trusting the other, has taken up many hours of fruitless talks.

Government officials have charged the Pathet Lao with stalling, as a means of gaining time for North Vietnamese troops in the country. Foreign troops are not obliged to leave Laos until 60 days after a coalition government has been formed, and rightist ministers assert that Hanoi needs more time.

But there has also been speculation here that the leadership of the Pathet Lao may be deeply split, and that this could account for some of the apparent indecision in the Communists' negotiation stance.

In recent weeks, the name of Kaysone Phomvihane has turned up prominently almost every day in broadcasts and other transmissions from Samneua, suggesting a possible shift in power. Mr. Kaysone Phomvihane is secretary general of the Lao Peoples Revolutionary party, the Marxist-Leninist guiding party of the Neo Lao Hak Yat, which in turn is the front leadership of the Pathet Lao.

One theory is that there has been a rift between Mr. Kaysone Phomvihane and his inner party leadership on the one hand with some of the old line Pathet Lao luminaries, including Mr. Phoumi Vongvichit and perhaps even Prince Souphanouvong.