

Cambodia Bid for Peace Talks, Truce

Phnom Penh

President Lon Nol's government is reported in agreement on reorganizing itself to induce insurgents into peace talks and a cease-fire.

"I will choose a new prime minister to lead the government with the participation of the opposition," Lon Nol said in a radio statement last night.

The President also said he will appoint 11 prominent political figures from his Social Republican party and the two main opposition groups — Republicans and Democrats — to a new council of political advisers. He gave no names.

The Cabinet ministers, headed by Premier Hang Thun Hak, offered their resignations yesterday under automatic provisions of the constitution calling for a government reorganization every six months. The president appointed the current 15-man cabinet in October, 1972.

Informed sources said Lon Nol is planning to include opposition members to meet American pressure for him to broaden his political base. The current government is dominated by the Social Republicans.

The inclusion of opposition elements in the government had been expected.

It was learned from senior government officials and confidants of Lon Nol that the Cambodian leader agreed to the move under pressure from President Nixon.

Mr. Nixon sent his special emissary, General Alexander M. Haig Jr., to Phnom Penh a week ago when the military situation in the Cambodian capital became critical.

GAINS

Communist-led forces and other insurgents made big military gains cutting all of the major highways leading into Phnom Penh.

It was understood that Lon

Nol would continue as president, although it was not certain whether the Communist side would accept him in any future negotiations.

During the past two years the 59-year-old Cambodian head of state has become increasingly isolated from the people. He is partially paralyzed. His regime is considered corrupt.

Some cabinet members will be dismissed and replaced by non-Communist opposition elements with whom it is hoped the Communists and other insurgents will negotiate.

Cambodia is the only Indochina country that remains without a cease-fire agreement. A Vietnam truce was officially declared January 28 and a cease-fire went into effect in Laos February 22, although fighting continues in both countries and no political settlements have been reached either among the opposing Vietnamese or Laotian parties.

BACKING

Many political observers believe that only U.S. backing, including massive American air raids, has kept the Lon Nol government

from collapsing.

U.S. air raids in support of Lon Nol's forces continued yesterday for the 42nd consecutive day. The U.S. Pacific Command at Honolulu, said heavy B-52 bombers and lighter tactical warplanes were making the raids at the request of the Phnom Penh government.

The Pacific Command said U.S. B-52s also conducted operations over Laos for the second consecutive day at the request of the royal Laotian government. A command spokesman declined to elaborate.

North Vietnam warned that renewed American air attacks in Laos — the first reported there in nearly two

months — and South Vietnamese military thrusts into Cambodia "carry the grave danger of a new and big explosion of war in Indochina."

The resumption of the U.S. air attacks in Laos was seen in Washington as a signal from Mr. Nixon that there will be retaliatory U.S. attacks for what the White House considers major violations by the Communist side.

The Saigon command reported that fighting in South Vietnam between government forces and Communist troops has ebbed to its lowest level in the 2½-month truce period.

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