

Clash at Airport**A Rightist Revolt
Collapses in Laos****Leader's
Plane
Crashes****Vientiane, Laos**

An exiled right-wing general returned to Laos from Thailand early Monday and tried to overthrow Premier Souvanna Phouma to block a political agreement with the Communist Pathet Lao.

But Prince Souvanna announced in a broadcast at noon that the attempted coup had failed.

The premier in a two-minute speech said loyal troops had recaptured the Vientiane airport and the leader of the coup, air force general Thao Ma, had been seriously injured in a crash landing at the airport.

But Souvanna said Ma and some of his supporters apparently had escaped across the Mekong river to Thailand.

The rebels captured the airport before dawn and strafed and bombed an army base four miles down the Mekong from Vientiane but did not get into the city.

Informed sources said rebels who did not escape with Ma were rounded up by the loyalists. There was no immediate estimate of their number.

The rebels seized air force planes at the airport and with them strafed and bombed the Chee Nai Mo military base four miles south of the capital, sources said. Five bombs were reported dropped.

No casualty figures were immediately available.

Government troops pa-

trolled the streets of Vientiane, and no fighting was reported inside the city.

General Ma had been in exile in Thailand since 1966 when he staged an unsuccessful attempt against Souvanna Phouma's government.

About 250 government troops surrounded Souvanna's residence.

In recent weeks Souvanna's government and the

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Communist Pathet Lao were reported close to an agreement to set up a coalition government. Diplomatic sources reported last week that right-wing leaders were blocking the signing of the agreement.

The rightists have been critical of Souvanna for making many compromises under pressure from the U.S. and the Communists, who control about 80 per cent of the country.

The Laotian rightists, mostly wealthy clans and high-ranking military officers, have been steadfastly opposed to the proposed new government.

DIVISION

The agreement calls for a new government equally divided between Communist and non-Communist factions but would also give the Pathet Lao control of about 80 per cent of the country.

It further calls for the expulsion of all foreign troops from Laos, meaning the dissolution of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency's paramilitary forces and training bases.

The new government had called for the 72-year-old Souvanna to be retained as prime minister with his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the

Pathet Lao, the senior deputy prime minister.

Internal disputes have spoiled efforts to bring peace to Laos for the last two decades.

PACTS

Two international agreements — in 1954 and 1962 — failed, ultimately bringing the U.S. into a bloody, clandestine war in the mountainous, sparsely populated kingdom.

The new peace agreement and the cease-fire reached last February had been given more hope of succeeding.

In 1957 Souvanna and Souphanouvong formed a government to run Laos. But when the Communist side made large gains in 1958 elections, the government was overthrown in a rightwing coup and the American CIA moved in to prop up a series of weak governments.

In recent years a CIA-backed army of Meo tribesmen had been decimated and the U.S. was paying \$100 million a year to 17,000 Thai mercenaries to hold the and the U.S. was paying \$100 million a year to 17,000 Thai mercenaries to hold the front lines.

North Vietnam has an estimated 60,000 troops in Laos, about two-thirds of them manning the Ho Chi Minh trail.

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